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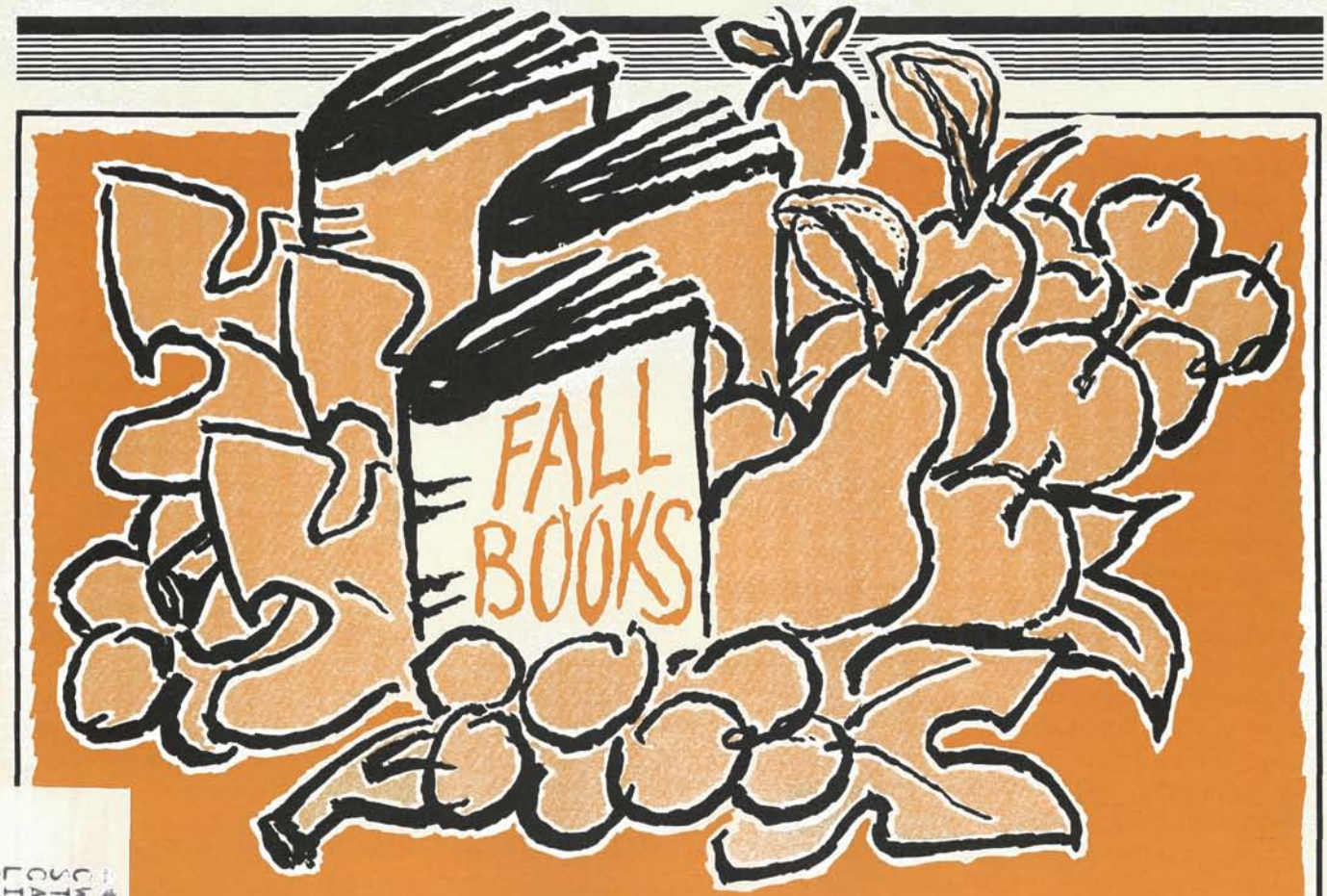

BLOOM'S BOOK: Jack Miles

Paul Elie on Richard Bausch

Taxing New Jersey: Michael Hoyt

& Mary Ellen Schoonmaker

oks: WILLIAM DI CANZIO on Paul Wilkes • FRED SIEGEL on Civil Rights
SEPH A. PAGE on the Amazon rain forest • LEE SIEGEL on Gabriel García
rquez • PEGGY R. ELLSBERG on Margaret Miles

THE EDITORS on
Body Parts • El Salvador • German annexation • Catholic higher education

ALL SAINTS
FATHERS, DAUGHTERS, MARTYRS:
Jennifer Corbett • Abigail McCarthy • Warren R. Carlin
GORDON C. ZAHN reviews
Kenneth Woodward's MAKING SAINTS

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CORRESPONDENCE

Sinful vow?

Shelburne, Vt.

To the Editors: The real paradox for me in Paul Dinter's stunning commentary on priestly celibacy [October 12] is how the vow can do so much to harm and inhibit and endanger priests, and not be seen as sinful. If it is, then all such vows are invalid.

WILLIAM CLEARY

Celibacy & community

Notre Dame, Ind.

To the Editors: I am always illuminated by Paul Dinter's reflections, and the latest on priesthood and celibacy are no exception. To stress the paradoxical—indeed, *koan*-like—dimension of the words of Jesus about "eunuchs who have made themselves so for the kingdom of heaven" is a refreshing "deconstruction" of the unilateral exaltation of the celibate state which has characterized so much of the official church tradition. Indeed, Dinter takes his reflections in a direction reminiscent of Native American traditions, which saw in flawed children a sign of destiny, and set them apart as instruments of ritual healing.

As Dinter puts it, celibacy "allows men and women, in some ways handicapped by their inability or lack of desire to achieve a successful and permanent emotional and sexual union with an opposite sex partner, to escape lonely isolation and pathological self-involvement." That may well be part of the story, and a part which deserves explicit attention, but the other side is also needed to complete the dialectic: the insistence of novice masters (speaking now from the perspective of communities of brothers and priests) that the aspirants had no business being there if they did not desire a spouse and a family. Otherwise, they would indeed be seeking a refuge, and theirs would be no sacrifice at all. As my Anglican archdeacon friend once reminded us: "In our church we have two possibilities: a married or a celibate priesthood; what we have no place for is a *bachelor* priest."

Religious communities do indeed make it possible for us, their members, to become much more than we ever could by ourselves, but the communities could never themselves be healthy if we were not also generative members. Celibacy without community of some sort is indeed an impossibility, and *that* is the *cul de sac* which the juridical linking of celibacy with priesthood in the Roman Catholic communion must face. Let us thank Paul Dinter once again for putting things so sharply and provocatively.

(REV.) DAVID BURRELL, C.S.C.

The writer is Theodore M. Hesburgh professor in arts and letters and chair of the department of theology, University of Notre Dame.

Shea got it right

Pompano Beach, Fla.

To the Editors: The article by John Shea titled "Here Comes Everybody" [September 14] was wonderful! Most Catholics, it seems, equate Catholicism with "universality"—from the Latin *unus versus*, or "one turn." This conveys the idea of a circle, which includes some and excludes others. John Shea's article conveys more of what Catholicism is all about; the church is *catholica*, "permeating everything."

MICHAEL HICKEY

Deciphering Weakland

North Easton, Mass.

To the Editors: Like other church musicians, I enjoyed Archbishop Rembert Weakland's letter to *Commonweal* [May 18] for its use of musical terms. You've now defined most of those, but in the issue of August 10 you confessed ignorance on the special musical meaning of "cipher."

A cipher is the sounding of an organ pipe when a key is *not* depressed, a condition that could stem from faulty mechanics or weather damage; e.g., humidity. A cipher can be barely audible or excruciatingly distracting. Archbishop Weakland may be thinking of the latter condition when he warns that "congregationalism or rule by majority [could] cause a disconcerting cipher in the church."

DANIEL LAMOUREUX

The writer is organist and director of music ministries at Stonehill College.

Regenerated

Winston-Salem, N.C.

To the Editors: Commonweal, you have outdone yourselves! Each issue seems better than the last, but with your issue of September 14 ("Regenerating Catholicism") you have published a hard act (even for you) to follow....Our parish council will be particularly heartened, and most of all our *sui generis* Franciscan pastor. Our church is bursting at the seams; our people a community of love in action. Situated in an older and less affluent area, we dream big and worship with enthusiasm. You don't see Cadillacs and Mercedes crowding the parking lot, but we have just finished building a Habitat for Humanity. The choir is small, but oh, the music raises the heart! A Catholic all my life (seventy-six-plus years), I never knew, until a couple of years ago, how rich the liturgy could be. My primary prayer is that my husband and I may continue to attend daily Mass at Our Lady of Mercy until we are called home.

CARROLL C. ESTES

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COMMONWEAL 65

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Body politics

Is a bullwhip or forearm up a man's rectum or a finger inserted in a penis a legitimate subject for public art? If some say it is, can offended communities still proscribe its exhibition? Who's competent to judge such questions? When a Cincinnati jury last month acquitted the local museum curator of obscenity charges in exhibiting New York photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial work, the verdict hardly resolved these issues. Legally, the case to be proven by the state had to meet the three-part Supreme Court test: the pictures had to appeal to prurient interests, depict sexual conduct in a patently offensive way, and lack serious artistic value. Apparently, the jurors agreed the seven sexually explicit images in question, including two of nude children, met the first two criteria. But the prosecution failed to convince the jurors that the pictures lacked artistic value.

Censorship has a high cost, and any case made in its favor must be absolutely compelling. Given the entirely voluntary decision made by those who chose to view Mapplethorpe's work, Cincinnati's efforts to ban the exhibit seem misplaced. Moreover, the legal definition of obscenity is so difficult to apply as to make almost any punitive action seem capricious. Still, Cincinnati's concern over the photographs was not, as many have suggested, the reaction of culturally retarded yahoos. Obscenity does have an effect on the quality of public life, as a quick visit to Times Square will demonstrate. One person's art may be another person's vice, but it also may be somebody's pornography industry. More important, imposing sensible prohibitions against obscenity requires an appeal to a collective public conscience, the same kind of conscience needed in the battle against environmental pollution or social injustice.

Inevitably, First Amendment safeguards make obscenity decisions ambiguous. That does not mean, however, that no public purpose is served by a debate over community standards. As art critic Robert Hughes has written (*Nothing If Not Critical*, Knopf), Mapplethorpe's reputation was greatly inflated during the 1980s, a sign of a "slump in cultural history," and evidence of the art world's loss of any "sense of measure." That loss of meaning, Hughes maintains, mirrored "the extraordinary decay of American public life."

The sources of that decay were evident in the Cincinnati trial. Many attributed the verdict to the prosecution's failure to contest the testimony of defense "experts," mostly museum curators, who professed to the artistic value of Mapplethorpe's work. "If it's in an art museum, it is intended to be art, and that's why it's there," said one. A neat tautology, that. Other expert opinion was tortuously euphemistic in its critical vocabulary, employing a rhetoric that reduced pictures of human bodies and human acts to aesthetic abstractions. Where most see a man urinating into another man's mouth, the adepts see symmetry and "formal values."

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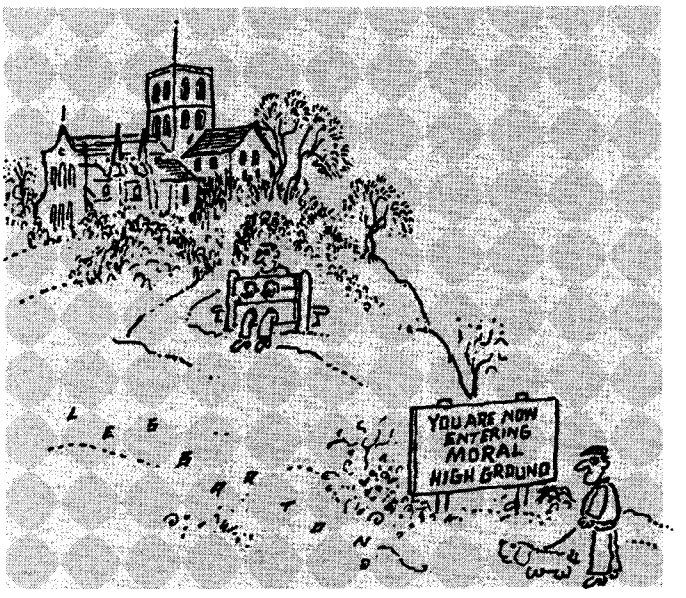
Mapplethorpe's photographs undoubtedly demonstrate an impressive technical mastery. But does such skill make everything he photographed art? If so, is the autonomy and moral life of a community helpless before an artist's superior craftsmanship? What if his pictures celebrate violence or racism?

Indeed, Mapplethorpe's severe, often anonymous images are reminiscent of the work of Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. Riefenstahl's hypnotic films *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympiad* harnessed a visual genius to the service of an obscene idea. Mapplethorpe rather reversed the process, glamorizing images of human degradation and challenging the fair-minded viewer to object.

Offered little contradictory testimony, the jurors felt compelled to defer to the opinion of the specialists when judging the moral implications of the photographs. "I'm not an expert," said one juror. "I don't understand Picasso's art. But I assume the people who call it art know what they're talking about."

This demonstrates an admirable open-mindedness, or gullibility, depending on your view. Either way, it is further evidence of how moral argument is excluded from public discourse. After all, is the question of obscenity really so esoteric that authority must rest with a self-serving elite? Does it mean that by definition Picasso could not be guilty of obscenity? Such an absolutist view of individual rights is a threat to self-government as well as human dignity. It is one thing to protect an artist's freedom of expression, but it is very much something else to hold any hope of a larger common life hostage to such expression.

The health of democratic culture and politics, which are the sources of individual rights, depends on a citizenry encouraged to bring moral values to bear on social questions. Self-government demands we guard against the temptation to substitute mere technical expertise for moral and personal responsibility. Establishing the immunity of Mapplethorpe's pictures from the collective judgment of the local community is not a cost-free vindication of free expression. Ironically, as Alexander Bickel noted, modern obscenity law imposes one national standard of permissiveness where a real pluralism of values had existed. But if democratic choice is important, why shouldn't New York and Cincinnati differ on what is an acceptable public use of the human body? The decision also, some would argue, replaced a coherent local censorship with an essentially incoherent "artistic" prerogative. How do we logically distinguish between the sick but sincere child pornographer and Mapplethorpe?



In granting such art a public place we must keep ultimate public aims, not just personal means, in mind. Artists are not always friends of human dignity, and a self-validating—indeed, infallible—"Art" can contribute to the general erosion of the instinct of self-government. Moreover, artists themselves might come to realize that a "sense of measure" in art can only begin in the coherent moral life of a larger community.

ROSES IN NOVEMBER

November 16 will mark the passing of a year since U.S.-trained soldiers, members of the Salvadoran Army's Atlacatl Battalion, brutally executed Elba and Celina Ramos and six Jesuits at the José Simeón Cañas University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador. In the garden where four of them were shot at close range, eight rose bushes have been planted: Two yellow ones for the women; six red ones for the men. They are tended with special care by the university's gatekeeper—Elba's husband, Celina's father.

Warren R. Carlin writes in this issue ("Holy Ground," page 635) that some gardens are consecrated with the blood of martyrs. But in El Salvador, the desecration continues with the blessing of U.S. funds. The Salvadoran Human Rights Commission reports that between January and August of this year, the Salvadoran armed forces committed 899 assassinations, 571 arbitrary arrests, and 105 disappearances (*Latinamerica Press*, September 27).

Over the Bush administration's objections, the Congress voted in October to cut U.S. military aid to El Salvador in half. Congress did well to do so. But the vote did not effect a basic change in U.S. policy; rather, it registered exasperation with the stalled investigation into the murder of the Jesuits, their cook, and her daughter. Reports from both the U.S.-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and the House Speaker's Task Force on El Salvador, chaired by Congressman Joseph Moakley (D-Mass.), detail that obstruction from a variety of quarters. The Salvadoran military has knowingly presented the wrong witnesses to the judge investigating the case, has destroyed crucial documents, and has stifled all investigation of the high command. Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani waited eight months to admit that he personally authorized the search of the Jesuits' residence two days before their assassination, and ten months to admit that he was at the military high command at the exact time the murder operation was in progress at the UCA.

The U.S. State Department has deliberately stalled the investigation. For more than ten months the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador prevented further testimony from Maj. Eric Buckland

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(U.S. Army), reaching the appropriate Salvadoran judicial authorities. His original revelations led to uncovering the involvement of Salvadoran officers in the murders at the UCA. This additional information might have led the investigation far up the Salvadoran chain of command. But it was delivered only last month, and only after Congressman Moakley learned of its existence.

Since 1979, the U.S. has provided hundreds of military advisors, conducted the largest counterinsurgency program since Vietnam, and sent more than $4.5 billion in military and economic assistance to El Salvador. In that time, more than seventy-five thousand Salvadorans have died. Today, as in 1979, the only hope for peace is a negotiated settlement. Then, as now, it hinges primarily on reform of the Salvadoran military, which we train, supply, and maintain. Congress took half-a-step in October. It should have gone the whole way.

HIGHER LISTENING

A sigh of relief is in order. The long-debated Vatican statement on Catholic higher education has been issued. In many respects the final document is a good deal better than the first two drafts augured, and the collegial process that produced it a good deal more effective and careful than the in-house drafting done prepared by the Congregation on Higher Education. These were vigorously criticized by Catholic university officials here and abroad, by the American Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, and by *Commonweal* ("Loading the Blunderbuss, January 27, 1989), among others.

Except for an introductory statement by John Paul II, "From the Heart of the Church" closely follows a third draft prepared by an international gathering of university officials who, working together, crafted a document that left room for local needs and yet addressed the essential problem, the Catholic identity of church-related colleges and universities, and focused needed attention on their drift toward an uncritical embrace of secular culture.

The introductory statement written by the pope reflects his immersion in the life of the university as a student, as a teacher and chaplain, and as bishop of Cracow. There is a deep sense of appreciation for the university, its way of life, and its singular contribution to the church. His words reflect a positive and affectionate understanding that many Catholics long to see in other Vatican documents.

Caveats and questions about the document will be raised, no doubt, when university officials and bishops' conferences around the world sit down to establish local norms. A passage that requires a quota of 50 percent Catholics on a faculty will be impossible to meet in some countries; in the U.S. it will certainly be rewritten to reflect the spirit of the passage rather than its letter. And there is a sentence in the pope's introduction which reveals other, deeper problems that also need sustained attention: "There is only one culture: that of man, by man, and for man." Lincoln said it better.

ET CETERA

ÜBER ALLES? The vindication of forty-five years of cold-war policy, the great celebration before the Brandenburg Gate, the unification of Germany on October 3 were hedged about with some degree of uneasiness that included:

The nervous joke: "Most non-Germans may understandably feel that where they put their capital is something for Germans to decide for themselves—provided they don't try to put it in Poland" (Michael Kinsley, *New Republic*, October 15).

The corrective political analysis: "You don't mean unification, you mean the annexation" (a young German student on being queried about the events of October 3).

The telling graphic: Maps showing Germany's varied borders in 1871, 1919, 1943, 1945, and now 1990 (*New York Times*, October 3, 1990), are a powerful reminder of its unstable shape and the price Eastern Europe has paid for the expansive moments and that the West has paid in ransom.

And, most important, the dissenting voice: Novelist Günter Grass has long criticized what he considered the chauvinist appeal of West German politicians calling for a reunited Germany. This appeal, especially when directed to displaced Prussians, Pomeranians, and Silesians whose homes now lie in Polish territory, seemed only a political tease nourishing a dangerous nostalgia. As a former citizen of Danzig (now Gdansk), Grass understood that nostalgia, "I, too, took the loss hard, time and again I had to remind myself of the reasons for it: German arrogance and disdain for human beings...." He accompanied then Chancellor Willy Brandt to Warsaw in December 1970 for the final signing of the German-Polish treaty, settling their borders at the Oder-Niesse line. "When we boarded the plane to Warsaw it was not with glad anticipation but with feet of lead. But when Willy Brandt went down on his knees on the spot where the Jewish ghetto had been under German rule, it became clear that the murder of 6 million Jews, planned and carried out by Germans...could not be rectified, and our loss of a homeland seemed insignificant."

As an alternative to reunification, Grass supported confederation, a notion he advanced in a 1970 speech (also the title of a recent collection of his essays: *Two States—One Nation?* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $18.95, 123 pp.). Last year he urged the Social Democrats to resist the appeal for reunification and work instead for confederation. He argued that the East German's courageous struggle for freedom, "chipping away without violence at the bastions of a hated system," marked a new and positive element in German history. Rather than buy-outs, he wanted aid without strings to ease the economic burden crushing the GDR and allow the East Germans to shape an autonomous and perhaps social democratic state in confederation with the existing social market state of West Germany.

In the event, of course, history took a different path; the German people, East and West, opted for seamless union, so that on October 3, East Germany, as a political entity, simply vanished.

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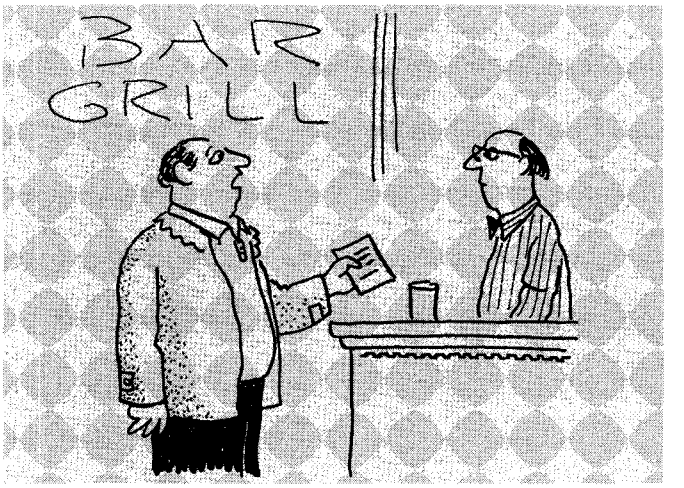
That is hardly surprising; the lure of future prosperity (and, with it, power) overshadowed the memory of what prosperity and power had brought the nation in the past. Less easily understood is the easy acquiescence of the West, which for decades gave lip service to the *idea* of unification, but only while it remained a distant and receding goal. Yet the de facto approval of two Germanys as a permanent fixture on the European scene has collapsed without a second thought; the future political and economic power of this new Germany barely crossed the minds of distracted politicians and diplomats. Grass worries about how much the Germans may forget; he might also worry about how much the rest of the world seems barely able to remember.



I have to leave early, John. In case some of the regulars come in later, here are my views on the new tax proposals.

FLORIO & THE TAX WARS

ROBIN HOOD'S MERRY PLAN

EDUCATING THE GARDEN STATE

Here is a story about the tax revolt that's supposedly blowing across New Jersey like a sand storm. The protagonist is John Budzash, the postal worker who called a Trenton radio talk show to complain about Governor Jim Florio's controversial new tax laws. The talk-show host challenged Budzash to do something about the new levies, and he did—he founded Hands Across New Jersey, the voice of the anti-tax movement. What's interesting about Budzash is that he's among those who will almost certainly benefit from Florio's plan.

Like everyone else in the state, Budzash is already paying 7 percent sales tax instead of 6, thanks to the governor, and paying on items like paper towels, shampoo, and beer, which had been exempt before the higher sales tax took effect in July. But since Budzash earns less than $35,000 a year, he won't pay a penny more in the state income taxes he has complained so bitterly about than he has in the past. (The higher rates start after $35,000 for single people and after $70,000 for couples; the new top rate, for single people making more than $75,000 or couples making more than $150,000, is 7 percent, double the old top rate.) Budzash is in line to get a $500 property-tax rebate from the state, and along with that, his property taxes, around $4,000 a year, should go down. That's because under Florio's new laws, Budzash's town—Howell, in the southern part of the state—is one of the winners. It stands to receive almost $7 million more in state school aid than it did pre-Florio. Its regional high school should get close to $20 million more. And, statewide, New Jersey will assume county welfare costs now paid by local taxpayers.

When reporters asked Budzash about these calculations, he brushed them off. "How do we know we're really going to get that tax relief?" he asked, adding later, "I think it's ridiculous to try to take money away from people that work and earn their money and give it to people that don't." Many of the thousands of people who have rallied against Florio, signed petitions against him, or put "Impeach Florio" bumper stickers on their cars could, like Budzash, end up benefiting from the governor's new programs, either through better schools, lower property taxes, or both. There are far more winning towns than losers. In fact, a third of the state's 600 districts will get at least 10 percent more in state aid in the very first year of the program, which is to be phased in over five years. Still, gut reactions rule the day. Two of the most prominent tax critics are radio hosts in Trenton who punctuate their commentary with pig squeals and the theme music from *Jaws*.

The middle class, in Jersey as elsewhere, is squeezed a little harder every day. It's not surprising that a lot of people in New Jersey—a state that's made up mostly of very small suburban towns with very high property taxes and a rather parochial home-rule mentality—are angry about taxes. The whole country is in the same mood. The Jersey tax revolt, however, is not the real news. It already seems to be sputtering somewhat, with diminished rallies and newspaper polls showing that voter discontent so far does not seem likely to translate into Republican gains in local elections, despite the governor's plummeting popularity. Other than holding rallies, the anti-tax crowd doesn't have a real opportunity for revenge until state legislative elections November 1991.

The real news is still Florio, who has until then to rebuild his depleted political capital. What New Jerseyans think of their governor by the end of next year depends in part on whether they come to understand his complicated message and whether they come to perceive themselves as coming out ahead, all things considered. What will they think of him five years from now? That depends in large part on the state of New Jersey's public schools.

Those schools are now among the most segregated and inequitable in the nation. They range from Camden, an old industrial town on the state's southern border with eighty-five thousand people and only ten thousand jobs, which annually spends $4,184 per student, to twenty-one districts in well-to-do Bergen County that spend more than $10,000 per pupil. For years, New Jersey has relied too heavily on local property taxes to pay for its schools,

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leading to huge inequities. The political boundaries within the state have been drawn in a way that aggravates the problem, with wealthier communities cut off from the burdens of poorer districts. That means the Camdens, the Newarks, the Jersey Citys never have enough money, even though they have more needs. They are forced to raise taxes so high they drive out or scare away business, and thus get poorer. The wealthier districts, on the other hand, can usually raise what they need. Some even have the added luxury of being so small and exclusive that all sense of economy and efficiency goes out the window. Two towns in prosperous Bergen County, for example, have two elementary districts and one regional high school district between them, complete with three superintendents, three school boards, and three support staffs. The total number of schools in the three districts is...four.

Shortly after Florio took office, he learned that Thomas Kean, his patrician Republican predecessor, had left a budget deficit of about half a billion dollars. That alone might have called for some kind of tax increase. (Florio had said in his election campaign that he saw no need for new taxes; that flip-flop is a major component of the anger his tax program produced. He had promised an audit that would turn up ways to cut waste, but after the election the taxes came first.) Certainly, Florio knew when he took office that he would have to address the school funding problem, at least minimally, because the New Jersey Supreme Court was expected to rule—and soon did—that conditions in the state's thirty poorest school districts had to change, and that the inequities were unconstitutional.

But Florio decided to use his early momentum to take care of both problems at once, and his educational funding plan, breathtaking in its scope, went much further than the court demanded: while the 30 neediest districts will receive most of the new funding—$1.3 billion over the next five years—some 350 districts will see their state aid increased, while 220 wealthier districts will lose state aid, some almost all of it. By assisting the middle- and working-class schools, Florio wants to bridge the political schism between them and the poor of the big cities. His opponents argue that he is trying to buy back the Reagan Democrats; Florio would contend that those blue-collar and middle-class working people are also damaged by the inequities of New Jersey's educational system, either with inadequate schools or with unjust property taxes. He took on the home-rule tradition, New Jersey's version of states' rights.

Florio realized that the redistribution program would take big money, so he marched both the sales-tax increase and the larger income-tax package through the legislature in dramatic all-night sessions. At one point, two very ill Democratic senators were whisked in by state troopers from their sick beds to cast votes. "A political master stroke," wrote a newspaper columnist in Bergen County. "We who are about to pay for it must salute him." In the wealthier suburbs his massive state-aid redistribution earned Florio the title of Robin Hood. Perhaps "The Equalizer" would be more appropriate.

What's wrong with that?

Well, the sales tax part is regressive, no way around it. One has trouble reaching out to Joe Sixpack as one taxes his beer.

Then there is the governor's campaign suggestion that new taxes seemed to be unnecessary. Christine Todd Whitman, the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate who ran a Quixotic campaign against popular incumbent Bill Bradley, says voters tell her it's not the taxes that anger them so much as Florio's *modus operandi*, and the sense that the size of the tax package was not completely justified or adequately explained. "They have the sense they were lied to," says Whitman.

While Florio's initial legislative triumphs were masterful, his public relations efforts were weak. He waited until weeks after the measures were rammed through the New Jersey legislature before making his first foray into the community to meet face-to-face with ordinary people and explain his plan. He was not aggressive with the press, failed to challenge misinformation, and lost momentum. Now that he and his people have sensed the depth of the tax revolt, they are pushing hard to get their message out.

Part of that message has to do with accountability. As John Budzash of Hands Across New Jersey so bluntly put it, some people don't like the idea of bailing out inner-city school systems. They see it as pouring money down the drain. Other critics point out that money alone does not guarantee an improvement in education, and that for years some of New Jersey's worst districts have perfected ways of quietly robbing their students of even the most basic education. Elena Scambio, the superintendent brought in by the state last year to straighten out the Jersey City school system, recently reported that the district's health insurance plan had been abused to the tune of several million dollars, even covering many who had long since left the system's employ, including dead people.

Florio has promised to guard this new money like "a pit bull." To make sure the needy school systems are held accountable for how their money is spent, the governor has appointed an inspector-general within the Education Department to examine charges of local corruption. He has also suggested that the smaller, wealthier districts think about ways they could save money and

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be more efficient, by merging, for instance, into bigger, more diversified districts that could offer students more variety. So far, that suggestion has raised no echo. In New Jersey the idea that suburban districts might possibly be wasting or mismanaging money is about as believable as little green men on Mars.

Yet money clearly does have something to do with a quality education, or the wealthy suburbs would not be yelling so loudly about losing even some of their state aid. In cities as in suburbs, money is what pays decent teachers and buys plaster, computers, library books, trombones, microscopes, baseball bats, and the near-tangible feeling that something important and worthwhile is going on.

Florio learned his politics in Camden County, watching generations of schoolchildren slip away and hearing the tiresome chorus that there just weren't the resources to do anything about it, when the real problem was a lack of political will. He's neither liberalism's new hope nor its last gasp, as he's been portrayed in the build-em-up-knock-em-down press. But he's an unusually gutsy and driven politician. Compared with the neighboring governor of New York, the one that looks so presidential, he is perhaps less gifted with shining words, but more prone to action. Florio contends that one accumulates political capital in order to buy something worthwhile. He's already done so, and despite a few premature obituaries, he probably has enough time left to accumulate some more.

MICHAEL HOYT & MARY ELLEN SCHOONMAKER

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RUSSIAN WRITERS TAKE STOCK

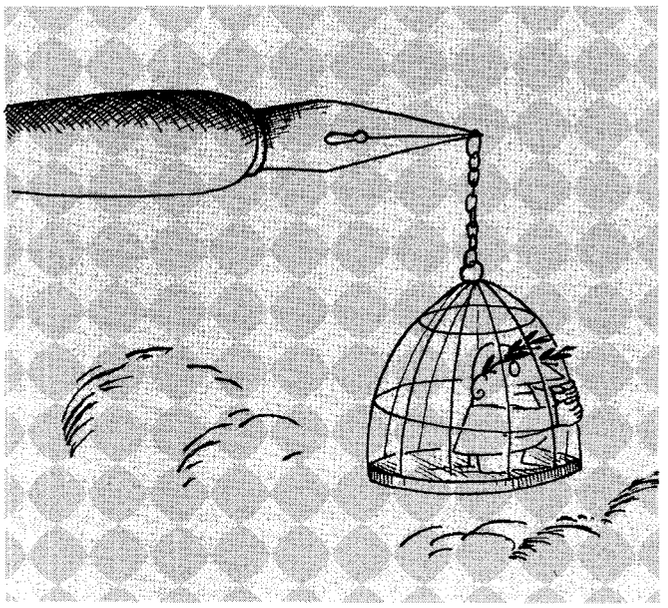
LOST IN TRANSITION

LITERATURE AFTER CENSORSHIP

Ever since *glasnost* and *perestroika* rid Soviet writers of a dependable as well as inspirational enemy—political repression—there has been talk that creativity would suffer and public interest would wane. What would happen when honest writers no longer had to camouflage their message between the lines? Would telling the truth bring the same thrill?

A small group of Russian writers met in September at the Daniel Klagsbrun Symposium on Writing and Moral Vision at Connecticut College in New London to address these questions. Poet Tatyana Beck had come from Moscow, short story writer Valeri Popov had come from Leningrad, and the poet Joseph Brodsky, winner of the 1987 Nobel Prize for Literature, had come from South Hadley, Massachusetts, where he teaches at Mount Holyoke College. They were all Russian writers, but they were worlds apart in other ways.

The philosophical premise of the event was nearly sabotaged



by a declaration of independence by Nobel Laureate Brodsky. Exiled from the Soviet Union eighteen years ago, he could not resist interrupting when in the midst of a bland but heartfelt speech about the desire of Russian writers to rejoin the world community, Popov used the collective "we." The word agitated Brodsky like the inflammation of an old wound.

Throughout the day Brodsky used this collegiate forum to make a very American case for self-reliance and the power of the individual. The issue on the table was: Has freedom undermined the creativity of the Russian writer? The fifty-year-old poet, who had freedom thrust upon him while still in his youth, saw it as a nonissue.

"I don't want to brag about it," Brodsky said, "but as for writing, basically one is always free. It is publishing that is not free."

Brodsky went on to throw even the validity of publishing into question, delivering—to tenuous applause—a very un-American speech in praise of anonymity.

Beck had observed that a reading by a poet as prestigious as Brodsky, which drew only about two-hundred-and-fifty people in Connecticut, would attract thousands in Russia, where poetry is a popular art.

"As for myself," said Brodsky, "I think the situation here, where poetry is all but ignored, is healthier. It at least makes you sort out in your mind what you are doing this for—for success, for applause, for publication, or for the degree of truth you can put down on paper."

Brodsky has yet to return to the Soviet Union, fearful, he said, that he would be met with flowers and—he searched for a modest word—"enthusiasm."

Prior to Brodsky's arrival, Beck had spoken of poets driven to suicide during the years of repression because their style was stolen by poets of lesser talent and integrity, who infused it with slogans and were rewarded with fame. Those Soviet writers found no comfort in anonymity.

Today, said Beck through an interpreter, slogans still abound in contemporary Soviet poetry, although they are wielded satir-

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ically, angrily. A purging is going on, she said, and when it is through, a new poetic voice will be heard.

While many of the voices that were silenced during the years of repression and stagnation are now being widely heard for the first time, writers in both the performing and literary arts admit that often the edge is gone.

"Poetry must be of its time," said Beck, "and that is why it's so tragic."

In the theater world, pre-*glasnost* "kitchen dramas"—so named because they could only be performed in the privacy of homes—are not having much success on the legitimate stage. As for the new plays, many are so much "of their time" that they offer little more information or insight than the evening news.

Coincidentally, while the writers met at Connecticut College, an hour's drive away Oleg Yefremov, artistic director of the famed Moscow Art Theatre, was rehearsing Chekhov's *Ivanov* at the Yale Repertory Theatre.

Speaking through an interpreter, Yefremov said that the disillusionment of Chekhov's late nineteenth-century farmer-reformer, baffled by the failure of social reform to transform human nature, provides an apt metaphor for the Soviet theater today.

Playwrights caught up in the fervor of what Yefremov thinks is nothing less than a revolution have put aside their historical duty to probe the human soul in favor of knee-jerk rehashes of current events. Such a course, the director implied, is doomed to be shallow.

On this point Brodsky would no doubt agree, although the poet hastened to dismiss the theater as "a low-brow, populist form of art" which "in order to survive has to attract the masses."

"Poetry has only to attract the individual," he said. "That is its insurance."

Unaware of these remarks by his decorated detractor to the north, Yefremov said the ideal play is the one "that can open up things about the human soul that are absolutely new, surprising. But in the Soviet Union today, the media sometimes give the audience more to think about than the playwright does."

In Moscow last year, the prominent critic Michail Shvidkoy, editor of *Theatre* magazine, observed that before *perestroika* the theater was "an island of freedom." Even a small truth like "we have not enough sausages"—usually spoken by a character in a play written a century earlier—was savored with delight.

Yefremov may be unhappy with the quality of contemporary plays, but to him, theater is no game. He hasn't lost his reverence for the "profoundness with which a human soul can be affected" by great theater, and he believes—like the poet Beck—that Soviet playwrights must purge themselves of "a lot of cruelty and negative emotions" before they get back to the highest purposes of art—vision, inspiration, revelation.

In a nation in which so many writers are just coming out of hiding, it may be awhile before they can entertain Brodsky's notion that the surest way to see clearly is to keep out of sight.

BETHE DUFRESNE

Bethe Dufresne is the arts editor of The Day *in New London, Connecticut.*

COMMUNION OF SAINTS—I

A FATHER'S DEATH

CHISELING AWAY NORMAL ASSUMPTIONS

My father, James A. Corbett, died October 20, 1989 of pneumonia secondary to Alzheimer's disease. He was eighty-one. He had retired from the University of Notre Dame in 1973, as professor emeritus of medieval history and paleography. He had been one of the founders of the university's Medieval Institute, as well as of the university's credit union. I have written this essay to remember some of what happened to him and to me as I came to realize this unwanted new member of the family—Alzheimer's disease—accounted for the erratic and permanent changes that were happening to him. I had to decide how I would participate in this long and torturous path of dying and death and I have not wanted to forget the effect of this time for my own life.

My father spent the last thirteen months of his life in the Morningside Nursing Home in South Bend. As a family we had decided in January 1989 that we would do no nutritional support once he could no longer swallow, nor would we initiate any diagnostic tests or treatments that would require hospitalization. This was all in keeping with requests he had made during his "well" life. We were fortunate to find a physician and a nursing home staff who supported our decisions.

My father was diagnosed about three years before we moved him to the nursing home. During that time he attended an adult day-care center, and I began attending support group meetings. Symptoms which we did not recognize as indicative of Alzheimer's dementia probably began to appear as early as 1982.

I felt the impact of the many well-known moments associated with this disease. It took a couple of months to realize that my father no longer called me by name. I began to introduce myself to him and tell him where I had come from, and that I had come to see him. Slowly, it didn't seem all that necessary to tell him who I was; his smile was enough to know that he knew me from sometime ago, and that he had good memories stored somewhere in his body. For him and me, it was a time of mutual chiseling away of many assumptions of "normal" life. If I wanted to walk with him I had to slow down my speed. I learned to stop correcting all of his impulses with reasoned answers which would set the world right for me, but often only added to his muddle and sense of being wrong. The order in which he ate his food, and how he ate it became secondary to his eating at all. What had taken about forty to forty-five minutes now stretched to an hour-and-a-half or two hours.

Talking did not constitute the essence of our visits and relationship anymore. I came to focus on what we could still do together. We could still breathe the same air, we could sit together and watch a Notre Dame game, though in time he became bored with this fall ritual we had performed since my childhood. We

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could hold hands, and we could pray. He remained very affectionate. When I told him that I loved him, at times, he could manage to repeat this sentence intact.

When I left for Chicago on Sunday afternoons, I came to accept that the next time I would see him—even if it was the following weekend—he could have changed. What he could do would in all likelihood be lessened or accomplished only with greater effort. I learned to appreciate this moment and what it was, rather than to focus on what it wasn't. I also realized that I would get one chance to do and say some things, and it was important to act on some of my intuitions.

The Paschal Mystery which we celebrate often is truly painful when it is experienced in one's own life through the loss of someone you love. I admitted how much I hated so much of what this disease was doing to my father. In a man that never expressed his anger violently, he now became more combative over the simplest of rules: what to eat, and how much, going to bed, and staying in bed, appropriate clothes for certain activities. There was a growing sense of purposelessness in his life that he worried over, but could do nothing to stop. He told me one afternoon in a rare complete sentence the summer before he died, "I feel like my world is being turned inside out." I came to see that many of his random comments were a code trying to say what this was like for him. This too demanded a whole new kind of attentiveness.

His weight loss, even with our efforts to help him eat, changed his physical appearance. Eventually he could no longer speak, or walk. His ability to smile at the sound of our voices left him, and left us. By the end of the summer of '89, I began to pray for his death. There was so little left for my father to give up, and it was so painful and wearing to keep this vigil with him as he was robbed of so much that was so important to him and that gave him pleasure. I began to wait for a phone call that would summon me home for the last days.

On October 16, around 4:00 P.M., my mother called me at Columbus Hospital where I work. She told me that earlier in the afternoon, my father's temperature had gone up. He had turned blue and was on oxygen for comfort. The doctor told her he would not rally from his latest infection, and we would not begin antibiotics. It was time to go.

I had the privilege to keep watch for the last four nights of his life, sometimes alone, and sometimes in the company of my mother. During the days and evenings of that week, in his presence, my family and I made the plans he had asked of us for his funeral and burial. We read the readings we thought of using; we prayed the Office of the Hours and the prayers for the dying. We prayed the "Our Father" to which at one moment he was able to grunt his Amen. We were silent with him. He was still firm in his grip of our hands. We cried in our own ways. My older sister Mary assured him that we would be all right, that he had been a wonderful father for us, that mother would be well cared for, and that we were O.K. Each of us, at different times, thanked him for everything he had taught us and graciously given to us.

On Wednesday night, the feast of St. Luke, my brother Phil, my mother, and I had a last meal with my father. A heavy, wet snow came that evening taking with it much of the power source for the nursing home. San Francisco was experiencing the aftershocks of the earthquake. Even the World Series, one of dad's favorite baseball "seasons," was stopped. It was an apocalyptic setting for the shifting that was taking place in our own world and which we were helping along. I went out and bought a chilled bottle of champagne and chocolate yogurt. This night he could still take some liquid from a straw drip. This "supper" brought a look of joy we had not seen in some time. He seemed delighted to have something other than water or juice. My mother offered a toast to him that forever will be in my heart: "Jim, this is until our next reunion, until we see each other again." Afterwards we anointed him with oil.

In the afternoon of October 20, my father's breathing softened and became slower. His fever from the infection did not respond

Beth Houston

Dad

I see him only as the darkness
taking a long drag on the end
of another summer day, the glow
of a cigarette among other cigarettes
at the end of the driveway,
among the slow red pulses
drawing breath, letting it
go, defying strokes and cancer.

His could be the sign language
guiding a plane down the runway;
the implied hand of a god
flicking a sun across space,
creating a new one with the metal
click of a lighter; wheels
of fire spinning in the ash
evening parked along the curb.

Whatever their charred soles crush
the wind carries a bit further;
small talk of tackle, tools,
women, insurance policies—
I can but surmise—
reaches me as a
thin drone of smoke.

All night I lie awake
burning.
In the sun where I am
relevant I discover
the dead fireflies in the grass.

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to aspirin. His hands were no longer pink even with the help of oxygen. He had lost the firm grip in his hands which were now cool. His body became more cramped into a fetal-like position. About 4:18 P.M., his body relaxed, his eyes closed completely. He smiled. At 4:20 P.M., he stopped breathing. My mother, my sister, and I pronounced him dead. I heard a silence that I had never heard before. My father rose from the power of this terrible illness. We could only imagine what he saw when his eyes closed; we knew by his smile it was good and we were comforted. No more fever, no more struggle, no more feeling lost for words, for money, for a car, no more restraints of any kind; no more pureed food, no more embarrassment, no more fatigue. My father was free.

When my brother and brother-in-law Bob arrived a short time later, we prayed the Office for the Dead. To honor his love for the Middle Ages and his scholarly contributions, we sang the *Salve Regina*.

We celebrated the liturgy of the Resurrection on the evening of October 23 in the parish where we had grown up. It was the feast of St. James according to the sanctoral cycle of the Eastern church. JENNIFER CORBETT

Jennifer Corbett, O.S.F. (Rochester, Minn.), is director of the Parish Nurse Program at Columbus-Cabrini Medical Center in Chicago.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS—II

HOLY GROUND

MARTYRS THEN & NOW

I happened to be looking through last year's diary recently, flipping through to see what 1989 had brought me. As I look back now I suppose I will remember 1989 as the year of the San Francisco earthquake, of the uprising in China, and of the revolution in Eastern Europe and that wild night when the Berlin Wall ceased being a wall. I believe I will remember 1989, for particular reasons, as the year when the Jesuits in El Salvador were murdered. I will also remember it as the year I trod on sacred ground.

I was in Paris that summer for the bicentennial of the French Revolution. I was aware of taking a kind of symbolic step back in time, of becoming a citizen of history. I stood, for example, on the spot where Camille Desmoulins harangued the crowd to take to the streets and begin the revolution, and in my imagination I conjured up the sounds of the speech, the aspect of that crowd, and the tension of the moment. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. I stood in the Place de la Concorde and tried to imagine the guillotine, the crowd anxious for blood. But the traffic with its noise and fumes, the hordes of tourists and shoppers all conspired to dissipate my mood. And then, on one occasion when I wasn't even trying, the mood snuck up on me, history and geography collided, and a spark was struck.

I had been reading in the Luxembourg Gardens on a warm, sunny afternoon. I came out of the gardens and began walking along the rue de Vaugirard. In a minute or so I came to a church, one with which I was not familiar. On the wall facing the street was a plaque. I crossed over to read it and discovered that the church was called St. Joseph des Carmes...St. Joseph of the Carmelites. As the plaque pointed out, more than one-hundred priests had been killed in this church during the revolution. That piqued my curiosity, so I went in hoping to find other plaques with more information. As luck would have it, a *visite guidée* was just beginning. A little old priest was gathering a small group around him, explaining the origins of the church, its dates, and it architecture. I joined the cluster. There was only five of us, so we moved quickly and could easily ask questions. Here are some of the things I learned:

At the time of the revolution this church belonged to the Carmelites. It was the place of worship for their monastery and served also for the worship and sacramental life of the neighborhood. In 1789 the monks were required to give up all of their silverware to the nation, which confiscated at the same time the monks' library of twelve thousand volumes. Then, for a while, the monks were left alone.

By 1792, however, the nation was on the brink of declaring itself a republic and, among other things, demanded of the clergy and of all religious consent to the infamous *Constitution Civile du Clergé*. In effect this oath placed the state at the head of the church and removed from Rome any authority in the appointment of bishops and pastors. Refusal to submit to this oath was, in the beginning, cause for arrest, but it didn't take long before refusal was seen as a capital offense. Thus in early August 1792, the Carmelite chapel was transformed into a prison housing 160 priests who had refused to take the oath. In their number were two bishops and the king's confessor.

As I listened to all this, I looked around the church. It was a large church, and of course, like most European churches, it did not contain pews. It was easy to see it as a holding pen for recalcitrant priests. But I couldn't help thinking that it would make for rather squalid living conditions for 160 people. Churches are not made to be lived in. But then the nation had no intention of letting those hostages live.

On September 12, 1792, a mob moved on the church. They were accompanied by about twenty soldiers of the nation and almost all were armed with pikes or sabers. They demanded entrance to the church and the convent, and after a long discussion were allowed in. They immediately spread out in all the buildings and the garden. It was here in the garden that they found their first victim. An elderly priest, Father Guirauld, was meditating in the relative quiet, seated on a stone bench near a round fish pond. The mob murdered him on the spot, and today a small monument bears witness to the deed.

We were told that several religious got away across the rooftops. But almost immediately a captain of the National Guard, Maillard, who was in charge of the operation, decided to set up a courts martial in the sacristy of the church. A guardsman, commissioner of the Forty-first Section, was appointed to preside. He sat at a table in an adjoining room and opened the register

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containing the hostages' names. One by one the prisoners were brought in and asked to take the oath. And one by one they refused. The officer did not pass a death sentence as such. He merely ordered the one who had refused to be taken to the garden. Each was then led down a short dark corridor to an outside door. Once through the door one is on a small porch with five steps leading down to the garden. There the mob had awaited the victim. The victim, it seems, had just enough time to see the pile of bodies at the foot of the steps before having his own throat cut.

As I stood in the sacristy—an immense sacristy as big as most monastery refectories today—I could sense the fear and the horror of the condemned, and even the madness of the mob. I had that feeling of awe that comes over us when we are in the presence, morally or physically, of martyrdom.

I walked through the little door leading to the garden and tried to imagine how one of the victims might have felt and what he saw as he emerged in front of the mob. But it was purely an effort of the imagination. What I really saw was a quiet, sunlit garden, in the middle distance, a stone monument to an old priest murdered while meditating. On the small stone porch I noticed an inscription in gold letters: "*Hic deciderunt...*" "Here they fell." Those bodies, all 160 of them, were thrown down a well. Some years later they were recovered, and today the skulls and bones of those martyred priests can be seen in glass cases in the crypt of the church. I suppose all churches are holy places in this world. But I couldn't help think that the holiness of this particular one had been paid for dearly.

It was a strange walk back on the rue de Vaugirard with the traffic and the blare of noises. A few moments before, I had been standing on holy ground. Now I was back in banality. So I began walking toward St. Germain des Pres. It was time for an aperitif. And I couldn't help thinking that some day air-conditioned buses will be bringing pious pilgrims to this spot. It should have happened long before this. Just as it will probably happen some day in that yard in the Jesuit university in San Salvador. Holy ground never loses its force or attraction.

WARREN R. CARLIN

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OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

MARY ABIGAIL McCARTHY

'BLESSED IS SHE THAT CONSIDERETH THE NEEDY'

I must thank Keith Burris (*Commonweal*, October 12) for writing about what I have felt I could not—the life and death of our dearly loved daughter, Mary Abigail McCarthy. In grief I find that you live on two levels—a level on which you function quite normally, write, go out to dinner, chat, enjoy others you love, do the chores of every day—and another level on which you wander in a kind of wilderness of wavering attention, strange lapses of memory, bursts of sorrow and fierce longing. That level underlies everything, and makes reflection impossible.

A kind friend sent me C.S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed*, a notebook of jottings written after the death of his wife, Joy, also from cancer. The one thing he feared in writing, he said, was that the person he loved would become "a more and more imaginary woman." "Slowly, quietly, like snowflakes —like small flakes that come when it is going to snow all night—little flakes of me, my impressions, my selections, are settling down on the image of her. The real shape will be quite hidden in the end."

I think that is true and, because I don't want that to happen, I have not and will not try to write about Mary. Those who read what Keith Burris wrote about her—"a great teacher, but more, a great person who remained true to the clear idealism of the sixties without the crutch of nostalgia"; a lawyer whose "commitment to law was incidental to her commitment to justice"—know that she was loved and valued by many others. And I can share what those others have written.

One of her friends and colleagues wrote of Mary as teacher in the last year of her life: "The representation of clients poses a particular challenge for clinical professors. They must provide an opportunity to learn-by-doing without sacrificing clients in the process....

"Mary McCarthy inhabits that tension as skillfully and sensitively as anyone in the business. She has been uncompromising in commitment to zealous, effective representation of clients, and if students have learned nothing else from her, they learned that lawyers exist to serve others and to serve them well."

Letters to Mary from students and former students in that last year bear that out. She appreciated these letters but she abhorred clutter and, after reading them, threw them away. But quotations from those we were able to save are moving testimony. One law student wrote: "I don't think I have ever told you that you made a strong positive influence in my life. You have—to be sure—taught me about the law, about drama and the law, about litigating, and about how tough and irrational the legal system can be. Back in '86, however, you taught me more about courage and integrity and conviction than about the law. You shared with me some of your indelible spirit....I wish my life to have some of the effect on people that yours has had on mine...."

And another: "I am working now with very talented, very hard-working attorneys. What I miss, though, is talking over cases with someone who wants desperately to win for the *clients'* sake rather than for ego- or wallet-fulfillment. You have set for me an example to which I see few aspire. Having been introduced to 'practice' by you, I believe I will always have only the highest standards for our profession."

And still another: "Your willingness to

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speak up very bluntly about things that matter to you reminded me that lawyers don't always have to equivocate—that some issues require us to take a firm stand even if it's unpopular."

A lawyer who was a clerk to a judge when Mary was in the Public Defender Service wrote: "Certain experiences in our lives make an indelible impression—things we hear and see that make such an impact we can remember every detail with great clarity years later. Your representation of your clients was such an experience for me. I have vivid memories of what I have come to call the 'Mary McCarthy' school of law. I call it that because you were truly unique, bringing to each case, no matter how seemingly 'routine,' a fresh perspective on some statutory phrase, legislative history, or obscure clause in a court rule that no one had ever bothered to read before.

"Your endless quest for new ways to challenge 'the system' was amazing—and sometimes, a little scary....Although you made my job a thousand times harder, I have admired you greatly from the start.

"The zeal, the freshness, and the diligence with which you represented your clients at PDS (Public Defender Service) was and always will be an inspiration to me. I believe that my own clients have benefited in turn, from the many lessons I learned as a young 'kid' who had the chance to watch a true master in action."

One colleague wrote that, "Mary cared deeply about teaching and devoted an inordinate amount of time and energy to her students. She treated everyone as an individual and generated in return deep affection and respect." And many students and former students wrote to us enforcing that. One student's letter was typical: "Personally, I am stunned and enormously sad. Mary was a very special role model for me. She showed me how to be a loyal and thorough advocate for my client, how to maintain the highest ethical standards at all times, and how to be calm in the midst of legal chaos. She was also a friend, a faculty member whom I could call by first name, who was interested in other parts of my life, not just my legal education. I want her back for my selfish reasons, and I am also upset that this new first-year class won't get to learn from her example."

Clients wrote as well. The most moving letter began: "Mary touched my life as well. I was incarcerated at the time. Thanks to Mary, my incarceration came to an end several months later....Over the years I have felt that Mary's sudden appearance in my life (after six years in prison and after a petition for reduced sentence had been long ignored) was rather mysterious. I believe that Mary's efforts to my benefit were greater than she ever acknowledged to me....I had the sense that Mary believed she was merely doing her duty, and for that no praise or thanks was warranted.... However, it is not possible to think of my freedom without thinking of Mary. I sincerely wish that I could have given to Mary as she gave to me."

His wife added: "Many people are gifted—but few use their gifts as Mary did. We are just plain people—Mary had nothing to gain by helping us. But she did anyway. I can never repay my debt to Mary, but I think she would have been glad to know that when I found a way to give to another I said inside, 'That's a "Thank you" to Mary.' We were a little moment in Mary's life. She gave us our life. We wanted you to know."

Mary had a gift for friendship. As Professor Stephen Cohen said at her graveside, the love and support she received from her friends was a reflection of her own gift. Her friends were faithful and constant—many traveled great distances to see and be with her in that last year. And those we did not know wanted us to know how much she meant to them.

One friend summed it up this way: "We all loved Mary very much; her intelligence, of course; her common sense; her sense of outrage; and, most of all, her sense of humor."

Another wrote from California: "Mary should have had many more years with us and we with her. There is a very empty place she had filled with her passion, her teaching, her wit, and her insight. We shared many projects, dinners, values, a few arguments, and a warm caring friendship. Some of my best memories center around Mary's bottomless soup pot and the lively gatherings of colleagues that she brought together in the beach cottage she so loved."

And a friend who came a few days before Mary died said: "I was surprised and enormously pleased that she was well enough to talk for a while....She still had her delightful sardonic sense of humor and was still able to be almost as wonderfully *present* as ever. The visit comforted me a lot...."

There have been so many letters like these and they are still coming—from contemporaries and from former neighbors and long-ago convent-school classmates, too. One of her high-school friends wrote to say, "I have such fond memories....you were blessed to have such a special daughter—bright, warm, funny, feisty, and loving."

Yes, we were, and it is very hard that she is not with us still. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

HOLD THAT LINE

HUSSEIN'S TANKS, HANNIBAL'S ELEPHANTS

How odd that the United States, despite having just prevailed in a Fabian struggle that lasted more than forty years, should be contemplating a plunge into armed struggle with Iraq. Why not play the waiting game, the game of containment that served us so well in that protracted struggle that went by the name of the cold war?

When I say "Fabian" I am alluding of course to the strategy adopted by Fabius Maximus, the Roman general who opposed Hannibal when the great Carthaginian invaded Roman territory in

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the late third century B.C., marching from Spain and descending through the Alps to the plains of northern Italy, elephants and all. The Fabian strategy was one of delay: stay close to Hannibal, but don't engage him in a pitched battle; eventually you'll wear him down.

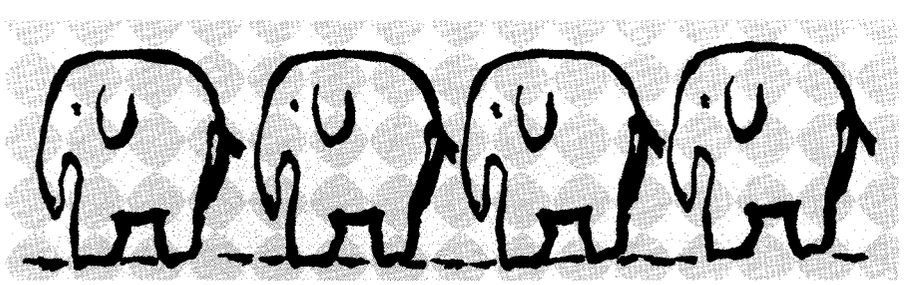
The U.S. has just won the cold war. It didn't end with a bang; it ended, not with a whimper, but a sigh of relief; at all events it ended quietly. Perhaps that is why the magnitude of our accomplishment has yet to sink in with most of us. But this cold war victory is one of the great military-political accomplishments in our national history, probably the greatest of all. For more than four decades we contained the Soviets, waiting for their system to crack under the strain, which it eventually did. And we did this, not alone, but at the head of a large and complex alliance, put together and kept together on a voluntary basis. Never perhaps in history has so extensive a voluntary alliance held together for so long a period and with so little internal divisiveness. Yet during that long era Americans and Soviets never killed one another on a battlefield (though the U.S. did fight two wars that were incidental to the cold war: a necessary war in Korea, an unnecessary one in Vietnam). World War III, though always feared and often expected, never arrived.

All in all, a truly amazing achievement! But do we realize how much we have accomplished? And do we appreciate how we accomplished it? If so, why are so many Americans—including, it seems, some near the center of power—eager for a quick fix in the Persian Gulf? Why do they want to throw away the lessons of patience we should have learned from our great Fabian success in the cold war? Why are they bruising for a fight with Saddam Hussein, instead of continuing to contain him with embargo, blockade, and troops in the desert?

When Hannibal inflicted a terrible defeat on Rome at the battle of Lake Trasimene (217 B.C.), the frightened Romans appointed Fabius Maximus "dictator," a post of exceptional powers created in great emergencies. But the dictator proved unpopular. His strategy was to "contain" Hannibal, to let the invader wear himself out roaming up and down Italy, far from his North African home, short of supplies and allies. But the Roman-in-the-street was too impatient for this long-term strategy; he wanted a quick fix, a knockout punch. Fabius was charged with being a wimp.

So when the dictator's term expired, a general more to the popular taste, Terentius Varro, took command; and he promised the impatient Romans to destroy Hannibal the first day he set eyes on him. Well, Varro soon set eyes on Hannibal at Cannae; true to his promises, he joined battle; the result was that the Romans suffered the worst military catastrophe they had ever experienced (216 B.C.). After the battle Roman allies in southern Italy defected to Hannibal, providing him with a base of operations and supplies. Eventually the Romans, who stood so near to total defeat after Cannae, rallied and won the war, but only after many years (in 202 B.C.), and only after the war had expanded from Italy to Spain, Greece, and Africa.

If an attack on Iraq would result in a complete victory after a week or two, something might be said for it. But Iraq is not to be confused with Grenada or Panama. The result of such a war will be not only many dead Americans and even more dead Iraqis, but increased ill will toward the U.S. from hundreds of millions of Muslims, Arabs, and non-Arabs, from Indonesia to Central Africa. Arab hostility, great enough to begin with because of our long record of support for Israel, will be especially sharp; and it could grow to such an extent that it will threaten Arab governments currently friendly to the U.S. Like the Romans following Cannae, we may find some of our friends defecting. Contain Iraq, and we have the world on our side; get involved in a prolonged shooting war, and we'll be increasingly on our own.



Critics of a Fabian policy in the Persian Gulf region contend that Americans are constitutionally impatient, too impatient to bear the figurative heat of the day that such a policy demands. They say that unless something dramatic happens soon, President George Bush's popularity will plunge, whereupon the president will feel compelled to prove yet again that he is not a wimp by launching an attack on Iraq.

What planet have these critics been living on for the past half-century? True, the American public will become impatient with drawn-out conflicts they don't believe in, e.g., Vietnam. But they are prepared to support a conflict they believe in, e.g., World War II and the cold war. The real question is not whether the American public will support a Fabian policy in the Persian Gulf, but whether they believe in the cause to which this policy is directed.

And this, I think, is President Bush's problem: he has yet to define the cause in such a way that the public will support it patiently over the long haul. He said it was about our "way of life"—which, I take it, is a pious way of saying "cheap oil." But that won't do, especially when oil has become more expensive. He compared Iraqi aggression against Kuwait to Nazi aggressions in Europe. But that won't do either; Iraq is not Nazi Germany, and Saddam Hussein, wicked though he no doubt is, is no Hitler. Finally, the president has said the cause we are struggling for is the sanctity of international law. This is more promising. But he will have to reconcile America's relative tolerance of Israel's retention of the West Bank, etc., with our complete intolerance of Iraq's retention of Kuwait.

This is a test of President Bush's capacity for "the vision thing." He knows there is a good reason for us to be in the Gulf region; but he hasn't been able to translate his sound intuition into persuasive words. Unless he can do that, his popularity will continue to fall, until one day he is tempted to prove he's no wimp by bashing Saddam Hussein as he earlier bashed Michael Dukakis and Manuel Noriega.

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THE BOOK OF B

BLOOM, BATHSHEBA & THE BOOK

JACK MILES

Harold Bloom has a lot of nerve, but then again he may not have nerve enough. *The Book of J*, Bloom's commentary on David Rosenberg's punning, experimental translation of portions of the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers is both less and more than it seems (*The Book of J*, translated from the Hebrew by David Rosenberg, interpreted by Harold Bloom, Grove Weidenfeld: $21.95, 340 pp.).

It is less than it seems when Bloom writes, at the end of his introduction: "I am aware that it may be vain labor, up Sinai all the way, as it were, to seek a reversal of twenty-five hundred years of institutionalized misreading.... Yet the book of J, though fragmentary, is hardly Mr. David Rosenberg's creation or my own. All I have done is to remove the book of J from its context in the Redactor's Torah and then to read what remains, which is the best and most profound writing in the Hebrew Bible."

Lay readers may be excused if they take away from that paragraph the mistaken impression that what Bloom calls the book of J, though not his creation, is at least his discovery, a discovery reversing "twenty-five hundred years of institutionalized misreading."

The inconvenient truth is that nothing in biblical interpretation is more thoroughly "institutionalized" than the notion that the Bible—and in particular the Pentateuch—is an edited work. The use of the letter *J* as the scholarly tag for the oldest of the four documents that after editing became the Pentateuch is a century old. The letter stands for *Jahve*, the German spelling of the reconstructed Hebrew god-name later respelled in English as *Yahweh*. Not even the separate publication of the Yahwist document is a new idea. In 1968, Peter Ellis published the Jerusalem Bible translation of J, with commentary, as *The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian* (Fides).

Bloom does not deny any of this. But he is not, as we say these days, quite "up front" about it either. Not until deep in the translator's first appendix do we learn that the authors have relied on Martin Noth, a German scholar whose major work is now two generations old, for their determination of just which portions of the Pentateuch should be regarded as part of J.

Bloom's main claim to originality, however, is not the isolation of J but the discovery or invention of "the author J," to whom he devotes the first sixty pages of this book. "As we read any literary work," he writes, "we necessarily create a fiction or metaphor of its author. That author is perhaps our myth, but the experience of literature partly depends on that myth. For J, we have a choice of myths, and I boisterously prefer mine to that of the biblical scholars. I will put all my cards on the reader's desk here, face up. My J is a *Gevurah* [*sic*] ("great lady") of post-Solomonic court circles, herself of Davidic blood, who began writing her great work in the later years of Solomon, in close rapport and exchanging influences with her good friend the Court Historian, who wrote most of what we now call 2 Samuel."

Boisterously, let me suggest that Bloom's most important card is not on the reader's desk at all. Bloom has lifted the notion that the author of J may have been a woman from Richard Elliott Friedman, who proposed it in *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Summit, 1987). Bloom cites this work in another connection but does not credit Friedman for the provocative hypothesis that Bloom has placed at the center of his own work.

Nor is this Bloom's only unacknowledged debt. Frank Moore Cross, Hancock professor of Hebrew at Harvard University until his recent retirement, has been for a generation the learned and subtle proponent of a thesis crucial to *The Book of J*; namely that Israel's epic—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses—must be read in the light of the beliefs and prejudices of the Davidic dynasty. Bloom mentions Cross, as he mentions Friedman, in passing, but here too he fails to acknowledge his indebtedness where it counts.

Does this mean that Bloom's work is without originality? Not quite: *The Book of J* is a work of modest, if finally truncated, originality.

But before taking up its originality, I would digress for a moment on the background question of the recent use of historical-critical scholarship by literary critics. The moment seems to me to be one of rich irony.

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Critical scholarship of the sort that began with Richard Simon's 1678 *Critical History of the Old Testament* and that came to a climax with Julius Wellhausen's 1883 *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* was essentially just a close reading of the text in the relative absence of theological preconditions. Though Simon called his work a critical history, you cannot really write the history of a thing using only the thing itself as source. Biblical history in the modern sense became possible only when archeology, including the recovery by archeology of lost languages and entire lost literatures, made possible the independent correction, completion, and, not infrequently, the confirmation of the Bible's own version of the events it reports. It was archeology, then, that turned critical scholarship into *historical*-critical scholarship.

Now, as to its tone and style, twentieth-century historical-critical Bible scholarship is very remote from literary appreciation. Though a literary text may remain historical-critical scholarship's ultimate object, it approaches that object through hieroglyphic, cuneiform, dendrochronology, comparative Semitic epigraphy, historical linguistics, and a score of ancillary disciplines of daunting complexity and negligible literary charm. The charge has quite properly been brought against such scholarship that it too often exchanges ends and means, reducing the Bible to data for the reconstruction of the politics and history of the ancient Near East.

Interestingly, however, a similar charge is regularly leveled against the neo-historicist criticism of modern literature that has lately become so influential on American campuses. What I find ironic is that this newest generation of *outré* literary criticism should have so much more in common with the staid older generation of highly technical Bible criticism than it does with the likes of Bloom, Frank Kermode, and Robert Alter. The latter, all professors of modern literature who have recently written on the Bible, are relative conservatives within their own field, radicals only when they set their caps against the "institutionalized misreading" of the Bible by historical-critical scholarship. A true literary radical like Michel Foucault, mucking about in the Bibliothèque Nationale, has more in common with a classic Orientalist like William Foxwell Albright, squinting at a squiggle on a scrap of parchment, than he does with an aesthete like Bloom. Foucault and Albright represent, even now, the threat of a literary leveling. Bloom, by contrast, represents the faintly antique folly of a literary exaltation.

What paleo- as well as neo-historicists object to in their more humanistic or literary colleagues is that the boys tend to get their facts wrong or only half right. In the present instance, Bloom denies, ignorantly and without argument, that oral tradition is possible or that literary creativity may be exercised by a community as well as by an individual. The folk tale, the folk song seem to be, for him, metaphysical impossibilities; no evidence can count in their favor. Bloom never adjusts his Bible interpretation by a hair's breadth in the light of an artifact or the evidence of literary parallels from elsewhere in the ancient Near East, and yet he is capable of reassigning a verse or an incident from another source to J simply because he finds it congenial. While, on the one hand, he takes the key findings of critical scholarship as given, on the other, he remains uncritically devoted to the romantic ideal of the genius writer, or perhaps the neo-romantic ideal of the genius writer read by the genius critic.

But so far, so fair: when historical-critical scholarship has done its best (or worst), it cannot and does not deny that there are genius writers and genius critics. The proof of this pudding, to return to the question of Bloom's originality, must be in the eating. What does this pudding taste like?

Bloom's method is circular and unabashedly subjective but, in my view, legitimate and, on occasion, brilliantly brought off. He infers a personality for his "great lady" from what she has written. Then, allowing the inference to feed his imagination, he reads the text again seeking what he might at first have missed. The text, now more deeply and artistically understood, further specifies the imagined personality of the author. And so on until text and writer (not to speak of critic) stand in a fully achieved reciprocity, creators of each other, as it were.

This method leads Bloom to four principal assertions:

1. J and her character Yahweh are both in love with David. In another Pentateuchal source, man is created in the image and likeness of God. In Bloom's J, Yahweh is created in the image and likeness of Israel's exuberant founding monarch.

2. J and Yahweh are decidedly cool toward the stammering Moses and oddly detached, even ironic, toward the Mosaic religion. "The Yahwist herself is not *a* Yahwist," Bloom writes.

3. The theomorphic David aside, J and Yahweh respond more to vigorous women than to even the most vigorous men. "There is a grand hardness in J's women," Bloom writes, "in Sarai, Rebecca, Rachel, Tamar, and Zipporah, a hardness that perhaps J found in herself, or in Solomon's mother, Bathsheba...."

Among all these women, it is, please note, Tamar whom J and Yahweh love best. An Adullamite married in turn to two of Judah's sons, both of whom die, Tamar seduces her father-in-law not just to avoid childlessness but also to claim a part in Israel's blessing and destiny. Bloom writes: "Of all J's heroines, Tamar is the most vivid, and the most revelatory of J's identity.... I will go further and observe that Tamar, despite her brief appearance in only a single chapter, Genesis 38, is the most memorable character in the book of J.... Jacob wins the new name of Israel; even more gloriously, Tamar wins the immortality of her own name, and a central place in the story that she was not born into and so had to usurp for herself."

4. J and Yahweh are cool not just to Moses but also to the Israelite rank and file. They are aristocrats, in a word; their affections go to the chosen among the chosen: "A life-long monarchist, as I read her, a distruster of priests and people alike, she had more faith in David than in Yahweh."

More than can appear in such an enumeration, these are earned insights. Bloom may go perversely to those verses that most critics find peripheral or even undecipherable and ignore those verses, even in J, that most critics find central. The result, nonetheless, has impressive internal coherence. Bloom's essays, "The Representation of Yahweh" and "The Psychology of Yahweh" present a god with a daylight clarity that can be stunning.

It is in this sense that *The Book of J* is more than it seems.

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And yet there is, even on Bloom's own aesthetic and free-wheeling terms, a structural weakness in this work and even, as noted, a failure of nerve.

Bloom never thinks to ask about the overall aesthetic effect of the removal of those other materials that were combined with J by the ancient redactor. We may grant that their removal throws J into relief. What else does it do?

The fact is that this removal produces an effect rather like that of an opera cut to just the arias or a film with all the dissolves and fade-outs, all the "continuity," eliminated. Looked at one way, J without the rest of the Pentateuch is clean and masterful narrative; looked at another way, it is just "Bible stories" for children. Bloom writes, intuitively (and defensively): "We need to be like wise children in reading or listening to J, because her mode, and not just in the primeval history of humankind, is like a more sophisticated kind of children's literature than we now possess." True, but perhaps all too true. There is a question here that needs more than Bloom has given it.

So much for the structural weakness. The failure of nerve is Bloom's failure to see how directly his evidence suggests that his "great lady," his *Gevurah*, is Bathsheba. The wife of a Hittite and almost certainly a Hittite or Canaanite herself, Bathsheba—as a nubile young woman—seduced the much older David even as Tamar, the Adullamite, seduced the older Judah. If Bathsheba is Bloom's J, we need not wonder that her sympathies tend so powerfully toward Tamar, that earlier gentile who forced her way into Israel's destiny.

No wonder, either, that David's queen should be so in love with her king as to take him as her model for the personality of God. Or that this foreign woman should look with such studied coolness on Moses and on the fiercer, more moralistic stand of Yahweh-worship that he represented. As we read in 1 Kings, Bathsheba was deeply involved in the court intrigues that brought her son, Solomon, to the throne. Among the things she did not blush to check up on, during that period, was whether Abishag, David's last concubine, was still a virgin after he had begun to sleep with her (she was). It is entirely possible that this indomitable queen mother survived her son as well as her husband, taking herself—quite as Bloom suggests—as the model for all those "hard" women of the patriarchal narratives, not least for the two—Sarai and Rebecca—who make impolite jokes about the sexual limitations of elderly men.

And finally, once her hapless grandson Rehoboam has betrayed the Davidic legacy, who better than the dowager queen to weave regal indignation into the warp and woof of Israel's foundation myth?

It all fits. Why does Bloom, otherwise so acute, fail to see it? He fails, in my view, because he has in *The Book of J* an agenda which requires the repudiation of the very insight that made his reputation in *The Anxiety of Influence*. In that book, Bloom taught us that a literary successor can escape the humiliation of being merely a successor by a "strong misreading" of his predecessor, strong misreading being the kind of deliberate, calculated error that brings new truth into view.

In *The Book of J*, by sharpest contrast with *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom wants history to stop. The earliest stratum of Yahwism is the only one worthy of consideration. No strong misreadings here, if you please. All successors, beginning with Moses himself, are to be seen as weak misreaders, mere corrupters.

But are they so in fact? Bloom, Yahweh's psychoanalyst, cannot fail to see the intrinsic interest in watching God's character change as the rest of the Hebrew Bible comes into being. But then can that process of becoming be called to a halt at the end of the Hebrew Bible? What is there, in principle, to prevent Israel's masterpiece from becoming, as Bloom bitterly puts it, "the Protestant Bible, in which the Hebrew Scriptures dwindle down to that captive prize of the gentiles, the Old Testament?"

The New Testament is, of course, the strongest, most outrageously successful misreading in history. If Bloom had the nerve to honor that misreading in the same spirit in which he honors Tamar for winning "a central place in the story that she was not born into and so had to usurp for herself," then he could also recognize all the greatness that intervenes—the greatness of Moses, not to speak of Jeremiah (whom he professes to despise) and Isaiah and Job. And if he could do all that, then he might have the nerve to face the implication in his own research that part of the Hebrew Bible was a gentile "captive" in its opening moments; that, in sum, Bathsheba invented Yahweh.

I don't know that a serious case can be made that Bathsheba was the Yahwist; but if we are in the realm of the boisterous rather than the serious, fictionalizing her is certainly a better bet than fictionalizing a German abbreviation. Bathsheba is a real woman, full of all the appetites of which fiction is made. Her career begins with lust in the dawn of Davidic glory and ends with ambition in its twilight. The possibilities for an imaginative (and heuristic) elaboration of her role are endless, particularly if we recall that the Solomonic era represented the high tide of Israelite openness to Canaanite and other foreign cultural

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influences, not just in art and architecture but also in literature and religion. Solomon himself, late in life, became an Astarte worshipper, according to 1 Kings 11. It is not implausible, in principle, that a foreign writer—whether Bathsheba or another—could have had a hand in writing some of the fledgling kingdom's first scriptures and could have introduced a subversive note of hostility to the exclusive covenant that Israel understood itself to have with the god of its fathers, whom it had boldly identified with El, the universal Semitic high god, and then declared the only true god.

Bloom's charge that the gentiles, with their New Testament, make a hostage of the Hebrew Bible is true but deserves to be handled as something more than a side-of-the-mouth slur. The New Testament is indeed a literary and religious raid on the Jewish covenant, but it only continues a struggle that began much earlier. That struggle was full-blown centuries before the rise of Christianity; and Christianity's resolution of it via a new covenant, though dramatically successful, is not the only possible resolution.

Tamar the Adullamite, Rahab the Canaanite, Uriah the Hittite, Naaman the Aramean, Ruth the Moabite—the list of gentiles whose virtue the Old Testament flings in the face of Israel is long and shocking. Among ancient literatures, that of ancient Israel is in this regard utterly without parallel. No other nation has so calculatedly undermined its own national myth.

Now, just here, in this process of subversion and counter-subversion is where we might have expected Bloom to excel. If he is not the leading literary critic of the day, he may be at least the leading diagnostician of literary strategy. When the Hebrew Bible celebrates gentiles, it gives evidence of an ancient quarrel, whether that quarrel be regarded as between contending ideas in the mind of Israel or between contending groups sharing the life and worship of Israel. This quarrel is the perfect subject for a critic with Bloom's gifts.

Regrettably, he ducks it. Determined to trump the New Testament, Bloom dismisses the subject of testaments or covenant altogether. J, he says, responds to "vitalism" and "impish" anarchy, not to covenant and stifling order: "Her Yahweh moves her at the rare moments when he is Davidic." What Bloom loses by this dismissal, this default, is nothing less than the plot of the Hebrew Bible. A high price to pay for tweaking the beard of the Apostle Paul. □

THE WAY THINGS ARE

RICHARD BAUSCH'S UNADORNED WORLD

PAUL ELIE

"Sitting in the shaded cool quiet of St. Paul's Church in Flagstaff, Walter remembers a family picnic." So begins Richard Bausch's story "All the Way in Flagstaff, Arizona," from his 1987 collection *Spirits*. Walter is a Catholic—a lapsed one—and the father of five young children. He is also an alcoholic, and at this picnic he nips from a fifth of Jim Beam and presides over the family's discussion of the faith they have been raised in. James, who at age eight announced his unbelief in God, "has since revised himself: he will grant the existence." Susan declares that she will be the church's first lady priest, then marry, after which she'll become pope. William, having seen *The Keys of the Kingdom*, crosses himself and mutters, "Have mercy on us," sure that they are in a state of mortal sin. Walter's wife, Irene, is patient, practical, frugal: "she's had to be." Walter asks himself what they think "of the fact that he is, by every tenet of their religion, bound for hell. This makes him laugh."

The family goes home, where the drunken Walter chases the kids around the yard: and suddenly Irene tells Walter that she is leaving him. On his own, haunted by memories of his father—an alcoholic and child abuser—he sees a psychologist, but "there is no use talking about childhood trauma and dreams: Walter is versed in the canon; his hopes are for something else." And so he finds himself in this church in Flagstaff, two years later, wondering if he should tell the priest "how he walked out to the very edge of the lawn and turned to look upon the lighted windows of the house, thinking of the people inside, whom he had named and loved and called sons, daughters, wife ... trembling, shaking as if from a terrific chill, while the dark, the night, came."

Deeply felt, at once humorous and tragic, depicting the breakup of a loving family, the story can be seen as a *précis* of its author's body of fiction. The distance between people is Bausch's obsessive theme, and in four novels and two short-story collections, he has explored the nature of this distance and the unfortunate dramas that it creates. His characters, ordinary middle-class and working-class Americans in many ways, live extraordinarily

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sad lives—lives sad in terms of twentieth-century standards of success, and sad in that they are shot through with the pain of separation. Made distant from their loved ones through death, divorce, or everyday estrangement, these people are nagged by their failures and regrets. When we meet them, they are sinners in the mode of confession, but lacking the usual consolations—of church or community, of optimism or ironic detachment, of any practical miracle that will undo the done. Their only consolation is an understanding of the events that have enfolded them. Though bleak, the lives Bausch depicts are rich with such understanding, for characters and readers alike.

A Georgia native who teaches writing at George Mason University in Virginia, Bausch in the last decade has been a "writer's writer"—recognized in literary circles but unfamiliar to the public at large. *Spirits*, called "a dazzling collection" by the late Walker Percy, was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner fiction award, and the novel *Mr. Field's Daughter* (1988) was warmly received by reviewers and other novelists. Now, with his new collection, *The Fireman's Wife and Other Stories*, Bausch seems finally to be writing for a more general readership. Many of the book's ten stories have appeared in large-circulation magazines like the *New Yorker* and the *Atlantic*. Two have been selected for *The Best American Short Stories 1990* by Richard Ford, the guest editor of this year's collection. And all of them reflect Bausch's affinity with writers such as Ford, Tobias Wolff, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Raymond Carver—a group whose hard-luck scenarios have earned them the nickname of "Dirty Realists," as well as critical praise and widespread public recognition.

Like the Dirty Realists, Bausch writes about characters in straitened circumstances: dead-end jobs and faltering marriages. Stories in *The Fireman's Wife*, for example, depict newlyweds who spend their wedding night playing charades in a cheap motel room ("Wedlock"); a young man of college age who paints houses with his alcoholic father ("Luck"); and a woman who lurks in the kitchen smoking cigarettes and brooding about her marriage while her husband and his shift mates play a drawn-out game of Risk ("The Fireman's Wife"). And like the Dirty Realists, Bausch has an earnestness that cuts through his work's unaffecting surfaces. All of these writers depict people who are unusually serious about their lives, and their use of fictional realism (a strategy considered outmoded not long ago) is meant to reflect a kind of moral realism that the authors and their characters share.

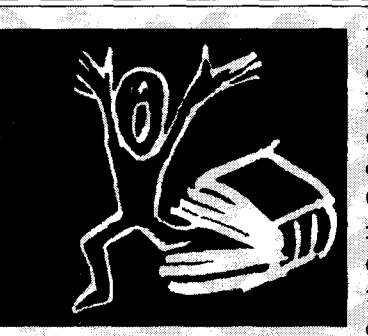
Yet Bausch stands apart from these writers. His fiction is modest in form, lacking the confessional elegance of Ford's, the comic dexterity of Mason's, the idiomatic verve of Carver's. Of his style, Thomas Cahill wrote in *Commonweal* [October 9, 1987], "It seems almost not to be there.... They seem the inevitable words, serviceable, but nothing more." As I read Bausch, I often long—in vain—for gratuitous style or wit. Their absence, however, seems intended. Consider a passage from "The Fireman's Wife":

> Martin and Teddy want to play Risk, though they're already arguing about the rules. Teddy says that a European version of the game contains a wrinkle that makes it more interesting, and Martin is arguing that the game itself was derived from some French game.

What is the wrinkle? What is the French game called? How did Martin pronounce it? Many writers—and certainly the Dirty Realists—would offer such details as the very essence of their prose, to give it an urbane realness. Bausch, though, has subdued the details through summary. There seems to be a real artistic asceticism at work here, with the author declining to stylize his characters' lives and thereby make them glamorous.

Bausch also stands apart from contemporary writers who have taken Catholicism as a subject or as a way of seeing. Rarely does he avail himself of the *modus operandi* employed by most of the authors discussed in this series—that of using Christian rituals and symbolism as thematic conceits, to give shapeliness and intelligibility to the chaotic lives their fiction depicts. Reading Bausch, one goes to church infrequently, encounters virtually no Scripture or theology, and considers heaven and hell seldom—and then as a passing thought or a quaint but dogged notion. When Walter is told, in "Flagstaff," that "life must be lived in the uncertainty of freedom of choice," the person doing the telling is not the priest, but the psychologist. There are no sermons here; when spoken, the names of the Lord are curses.

Bausch's constant, then, if not what he calls "the cramp of religion," is the cramp of ordinary American life. His settings are small towns of the kind that appear in so much contemporary fiction, but he has shorn them of the brand names and mundane details that such fiction has made its leitmotifs. While Point Royal, Virginia, for example, is presented in two novels and many stories, Bausch's depiction of it is a general one, without the loving specificity of William Kennedy's Albany or Andre Dubus's New England mill towns. In the same way, his characters are frankly ordinary: smart but not learned, comic but not witty, reflective but rarely philosophical. When a man in "Wise Men at Their End" quotes Keats, it seems a quirk in his personality; when we learn that Walter is a night clerk in a 7-Eleven, we feel pity for a father of five, not the delight of name recognition.



Paul Elie's critical essay on Richard Bausch is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's works, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of a Richard Bausch have to tell us about our common world, about the state of our souls? The most recently published article in the series was written by Edward T. Wheeler on David Lodge (September 28, 1990).

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All of this ordinariness seems deliberate. If Flannery O'Connor strove to overcome the lack of a believing audience for her work by distorting Christian motifs until they shocked or provoked the reader, Bausch has evidently taken the opposite course, conforming his whole approach to a world of diminished expectations. When, for example, the middle-aged priest who is the main character in Bausch's first novel, *Real Presence* (1980), lets his mind turn to sin, he reflects on how *boring* it is:

> And one Saturday night, during a long, sleep-inducing stint in the confessional—how could anyone believe that sin was enticing, or that sins were interesting: it was all, always, so horribly the same, so mean, so colorless: it was the deepest boredom—he thought he recognized her voice ....

Such a view of sin is central to Bausch's fiction. Just as his characters live in conventional frame houses and wear plain clothes, so their sins take unremarkable forms—bad habits, private grudges, unwise decisions, and the like. Returning home from a bitter meeting with his estranged wife, the narrator of "Police Dreams" (from *Spirits*) deliberately scares the sleeping babysitter. In the new book's "The Eyes of Love," a man is startled to find himself looking at his wife "as though he were a stranger, someone unable to imagine what anyone, another man, other men, could see in her to love." And though it is not presented as such, *Mr. Field's Daughter* can be read as a meditation on the plainness and vagueness of sin. As it depicts the strained relationship between a widowed father and his only daughter, the novel dramatizes the day-in, day-out strain of our having freedom of choice when so many of our choices later seem to have been wrong ones—when we don't know whether we have sinned or simply done the wrong thing for the right reasons.

Since his wife's death, Field, a banker in Duluth, has raised Annie by himself. When, at nineteen, she marries Cole Gilbertson, a lazy and arrogant young Army veteran, Field, "acting out of love, and worry," sets about rectifying the situation. "How we choose to live is our own business," Annie has declared, but Field—and Bausch with him—is bent on suggesting the contrary: that our relationships and their histories grip us against our will, unfathomably and unshakably.

Like many a Bausch character, when Field finally acts he does so on impulse, having been "visited with the strange, elated conviction that no other outcome was possible." He pursues the couple to Illinois, where he is struck by his now-pregnant daughter's descent into sordidness. Then the narrative moves ahead four years: Annie has left Cole and come, with her young daughter, to live with Field. He is glad to have her back, but his "soul turns on regret," and he spends nights "tightening the screws of [his] own pain." As Annie is courted by and decides to marry a good man, twice her age, whom Field knows through the local widower's club, Field ponders his role in her life. During a club discussion of single parenting, he confesses his sins:

> I've had trouble being patient sometimes, and sometimes I've probably been too patient.... I tried to be a friend to her, when that was called for, and a lot of the time, probably when it was not. I listened to her as much as I could ... I mean I tried to be a good father, and give her everything she needed to grow up and be whoever she wanted to be, and the result of all that was that she ran off with the first pretty-looking kid that came along. ... It was like everything I'd tried to teach her and everything we'd been to each other—it just all—it—none of it mattered. And this kid ... I loathe him.

Cole has followed his wife and daughter back to Duluth, bringing an old girlfriend and a raging cocaine habit. The novel's outcome hinges on a tabloid-style shooting, with Cole hating Field as much as he does Annie's new lover. But here, as elsewhere, Bausch resists the easy moral judgment. He flattens out the distinctions between the unfailingly decent father and the drug-addled, ex-husband, believably showing the similarities between the two of them. While he writes of Cole's girlfriend, "it had been one of her propensities to analyze him ... as though he represented a species separate from her own," Bausch depicts Cole much the way he does Field: as frankly, sinfully human.

To do this, he establishes a sort of fictional democracy in which no one character is allowed to fully claim the reader's attention or sympathy. Fair-minded as this strategy may be, it results in a frustrating looseness of structure. The novel jumps around in place and time, presenting the perspectives of Field, Cole, Annie, her lover, and her daughter. These are rendered in the whole range of short forms—letters, diaries, italicized monologues, third-person narration—and are often quite effective in themselves. But Bausch's prose style varies little from one to the next, and so the different viewpoints blend together, unintentionally, rather than revealing by way of contrast.

Bausch's earlier novels, too, are ungainly and digressive. In *Real Presence*, the closely drawn portrait of Father Sheppard is periodically interrupted by the thoughts of Elizabeth Bexley, whose displaced family has made itself welcome in his church's rectory. In *The Last Good Time* (1984), a touching depiction of a retired musician is set aside midway for the life story of the man's bedridden best friend. And *Take Me Back* (1981), though described by James Dickey as "seamless, perfectly wrought," seems to me all middle; its story seems never to rise or fall. Perhaps Bausch is simply a writer whose talents are better suited to short stories than to longer ones. Perhaps—since it is in his more recent books that he shows his mastery of the short form—he is just getting better as he goes. Yet I wonder if there is in fact a design behind the awkward shapes of his novels—a guiding intention that, like so much in his work, is grounded in moral

Books discussed in this article

The Fireman's Wife and Other Stories, *The Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1990.*
Mr. Field's Daughter, *Collier, 1989.*
Spirits and Other Stories, *Penguin, 1987.*
The Last Good Time, *The Dial Press, 1984 (out of print).*
Take Me Back, *The Dial Press, 1981 (out of print).*
Real Presence, *The Dial Press, 1980 (out of print).*

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or religious convictions.

This design, paradoxically, has to do with a seeming absence of design. In twentieth-century fiction, the kind of narrative design found in a Dickens novel—with plot twists, climaxes, recurrent themes—has been suspect. Many modern writers have replaced this design with some exterior structural principle, such as myth, or some interior one, say, that of human consciousness. These writers have often been compelled to justify their doing so. Don DeLillo, for example, speaks of order and structure as "legitimate consolations" of fiction, which give us "the sense of balance that so often escapes us in ordinary experience."

These, however, are consolations that Bausch has refused himself and his readers. Just as he declines to make his characters unusually witty or charismatic, so he seems wary of streamlining their stories through the use of orderly or elegant narration. Instead, he tells stories of the kind longed for by the old man in Grace Paley's "A Conversation with My Father": "Just recognizable people and then write down what happened to them next." They suggest the ungraceful designs of human lives.

Bausch's seeming indifference to structural harmony (in his novels, at least) has the effect of making the people he depicts more important than the way he depicts them. You come to feel that they exist outside the books themselves. As Thomas Cahill wrote of *Spirits*, "You feel ... that Bausch has imagined everything about these characters—the way they cried and held their bodies as infants, the way they hurt and admired themselves as adolescents, their secret yearnings, their middle-aged bowel movements, all their years and idiosyncracies, far beyond anything he sets on the page." By writing books with rough edges, Bausch reminds us that these are only partial portraits, and implies that he makes no claim to understanding people in all their quirky complexity.

And if Bausch's novels seem inharmonious in themselves, when considered *in toto* his work yields patterns and symmetries. While his stories deal largely with separation, for example, his novels all depict tense and unlikely unions, in which the distance between people is briefly transcended. One person moves in on another, and they struggle to overcome their differences, eventually tolerating and even loving each other.

In *Real Presence*, the world-weary Father Sheppard is forced by his parishioners to house the luckless Bexleys: the public man of virtue is asked to put his money where his mouth is. Wisely, Bausch doesn't dwell on the symbolic aspects of this dilemma, such a common one in fiction about the clergy. When Sheppard accepts the family into his rectory, he is not being Christlike, and he is not sidestepping hypocrisy. He is simply too dispirited to resist them. As they disrupt his life, he doesn't think of them as a cross to bear, just as an annoyance. Until the novel's end the priest remains remorselessly selfish—so much so that his eventual change of heart is earned and convincing.

The forced unions in Bausch's other novels, though not as dramatic, are no less challenging for the principals. In *Take Me Back*, a teenage girl comes from New York to rural Virginia, startling a boy and his jaded stepfather with her vitality. And in *The Last Good Time*, widower Edward Cakes, "alone, because that was the way his life had gone," opens up his apartment to a pregnant woman half a century younger than he is. Each of them needs love. Their brief, consummated romance is believable and not a bit tawdry—and full of the caring that is often absent from the more typical affairs Bausch depicts elsewhere.

Spirits, while a collection of varied and independent stories, is also a thoroughgoing exploration of the nature of spirits. In the title story, a writer goes on retreat to a country college, only to find "spirits" ruling his imaginative life: a serial killer on the news, John F. Kennedy, the former Kennedy aides whose love letters he reads while house-sitting in their apartment, and his wife, who has stayed behind in a distant university town. In all of these stories, alcoholic spirits are a constant presence, ruining lives or easing the pain of them (told that whiskey kills brain cells, a character in "Wise Men at Their End" replies: "But we have millions of those"). And the spirit of an absent father looms over the book—from Walter's fear (in "Flagstaff") "that he will repeat, with his own children, the pattern of his father's brutality," to the dead man in "Contrition" of whom his son says: "I'm born Catholic and God is like a hurricane on the West Coast. I never saw my father." Absent father, absent Father: you need not be a theologian or literary critic to see the analogy Bausch has developed here.

The new book, *The Fireman's Wife*, seems like a consolidation, in which Bausch ties together the strands of his subject and his style. The title story is paired, to form a diptych, with one called "Consolation": as Milly Harmon deals with her husband's death and its consequences, we see a pattern of separation and contrived union that is familiar from Bausch's stories and novels. Two generous monologues, "Old West" and "Letter to the Lady of the House," reveal Bausch's ability to enter into the character of a very old man, which he demonstrated in *The Last Good Time*. And though two stories are disturbingly imitative ("Luck" of Raymond Carver, "Wedlock" of Tobias Wolff), the book as a whole shows that Bausch, a latecomer to literary celebrity, has been purveying dirty realism for a decade now.

The real tie that binds in Bausch's work, though, is not a subject or a style, but a less tangible quality—a spirit, one might say, that fills his books, giving them wholeness, harmony, and radiance of a most elusive kind. What to call it? Novelist George Garrett

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has noted that Bausch's work is "firmly based upon assumptions of care, concern, compassion, and the rare and committed belief that the lives of his characters...matter." Now, anyone who has fallen under the spell of Flannery O'Connor's essays will recoil at once from "compassion." O'Connor disparaged the word as one held dear by the reader who, "if he believes in grace at all, sees it as something which can be separated from nature and served to him raw as Instant Uplift." She went on, however, to call attention to a better sense in which the word can be used: "the sense of being in travail with and for creation in its subjection to vanity." This compassion, she declared, "implies a recognition of sin; this is a suffering-with, but one which blunts no edges and makes no excuses."

With its unflinching portrayals of troubled characters, Richard Bausch's fiction achieves this suffering-with, a wisdom that enlightens without offering easy consolations. Call it care, concern, compassion—Bausch's novels and stories have it in abundance, and make it seem elemental and necessary. When young Mary Bellini in *The Last Good Time* argues that "the secret is not to care," one knows this to be untrue in the reading. And when a widowed woman in "Ancient History" confesses to her son, "I don't know why, but I find it—well, reassuring, somehow, that we—we—leave such a gaping hole in everything everywhere we go," one feels that her tentative and enigmatic voice, like Bausch's, speaks truths that lurk in the hearts of the least of us. □

THE LAUGHING CEMETERY

A JOURNEY TO ROMANIA

WILLIAM BUTT

May 13, Sunday. We are going to Romania. Our friends here in Canada ask why. Why on earth Romania? Because it's open right now to visitors, for who knows how long. But more, because Romania's been monstrously misgoverned by certifiable psychotics—the Ceausescus—and yet we are friends of friends of many good people who live there. We want to know: How have some kept their souls in a country where so much has gone so wrong?

May 16, Wednesday. We cross the border from Hungary, and drive the ten minutes into Oradea. In this Transylvanian city, neglect and decay. On many buildings, the stucco has peeled and sags; the under-brick gapes through. Beggars abound, stowed on sidewalks with pant-legs pulled up to show us, ostentatiously, ulcerous legs, withered legs, artificial legs.

Everyone tells, unprompted, tales of the Ceausescus. They were paranoid hypochondriacs who for fear of germs never wore the same clothes twice. Vampires who got blood transfusions daily from children. Nicu their playboy-addict-sadist son kept a torture chamber. He ripped out two fingernails of Nadia Comaneci. After a while, without some context of authentic information, you don't know what not to believe. Chronic liars, the Ceausescus deceived everyone, including themselves. Truth became hard to determine. It still is.

The new Romanian flag is the old flag, three broad vertical stripes, red, yellow, blue—except that in the middle, in the yellow, where Ceausescu had a sun over mountains, everyone has cut a circular hole. The mark of the old regime ripped out, leaving a mutilation where the future and the center should be.

May 20, Sunday. Election day, Romania's first since the Communists came in. We're in Lorau, a Transylvanian village by the Crisul Repede River, tucked into Carpathian foothills. The valley people have gathered around the village hall. Men in shapeless suit coats and narrow-brimmed felt hats; women in flowered skirts and flowered scarves, and heavy socks and cardigans though the sun is warm.

After voting they do not go home, but stand outside to talk. This is a day to share. Their mood is cautious though not cynical, accepting though not passive, pleasant though hardly festive: the peasant mood implanted by centuries of living with the valley and the seasons—and with capricious overlords.

We walk up Lorau's single dirt side-street to the Orthodox church. To the villagers the liturgy, unlike elections, is familiar, the cantor's song and the old slow chants. Here is a mood of infinitely less detachment than that of the voters down the hill.

Large and convincingly, beside the altar-screen, a painted Christ raises Lazarus. Did a faith that their God gives new life help these villagers through the years of Ceausescu?

Yes: On either side of the altar-screen, the congregation has erected flags. To the right, the Romanian flag, that circular gap in its center. To the left, the flag of France. Last fall Ceausescu put Lorau on his list to be razed. And so the people twinned themselves with a village in France, hoping international attention might slow Ceausescu down. Lorau is still here, and the French flag, to show what these worshippers affirm, that God's community is international.

This morning's service includes a baptism. The mother wears

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her traditional handmade costume. On each white sleeve, hand-embroidered tulips and bluebells climb to the shoulder as if up a trellis. Roses and blue poppies bloom at the base of her black skirt and rise onto the matching vest. She beams with shy pride. What she wears represents hour after hour of loving handcraft, a tradition of making beautiful things, decorating life to praise it.

The priest anoints her infant with water and with oil. Mother with child and family and closest friends kneel in a cluster for his blessing. On election day, symbol of hope for a new beginning to Romania's battered history.

May 22, Tuesday. Still in Carpathian foothills, west of the town of Beius, we climb a steep hill to Transylvania's best wooden church. When the Austro-Hungarians ruled here, they prohibited Orthodox churches of stone. The Romanians were left instead to build of their forests' wood, which the Protestant rulers hoped would rot with time—like the Orthodox church itself.

The people took lovingly to wood, a material to them alive and organic. Here each wooden shingle is curved across its bottom edge, giving an effect like scales, the texture of living skin. At eye-level all around the thick log walls runs a carved representation of twisted-hemp rope. An image of woven unity—craftily made from an image of bondage. A stubborn, distinctive beauty, born from repression.

On the wall hangs a battered wooden board, the toaca. Struck by a wooden mallet, its tone spreads loud and resonant. Though metal bells are no longer forbidden, the toaca still summons the faithful, each nick in the soft board a record of their worship.

May 23, Wednesday. Timisoara, birthplace of last December's revolution. In the main square where no-one-knows-how-many died there is ferment still: makeshift stages and banners (*Jos Communismul*: Communism Down), and sleep-in protesters, and vendors of new political papers, and knots of men and women reading them, or engaged in vehement discussions. The ear of one paper quotes the 75th Psalm. "*Caci nici de la rasarit, nici de la apus, nici din muntii pustiei nu vine ajutorul.*" "For neither from east nor west nor from the desert mountains shall come our aid." A resonant translation. At Europe's edge where East and West blocs meet, Romanians struggle for their own solutions.

From the square you look down the promenade to the tall church formerly of Turges Laszlo, the Hungarian-Protestant priest whose sermons against repression were sparks that helped set the revolution burning. Outside it we are drawn to three polished oak crosses which honor the revolutionary dead: gifts of the maestros of Birsana, Romania's foremost village of carvers.

One cross rises four metres high, in designs of astonishing complexity, as if the carver did not want to stop. Seven panels of massive and detailed crowd scenes decorate both front and back: scenes of battle, of mourning, of celebration. Below, an open book shows a dove with an olive branch. Above, a banner drapes the monument's multiple roofs, embroidered with the head of Christ in thorns. Two outer pillars are carved in that symbol of the rope—unity from bondage. Christmas evergreen branches entwined with recent roses still adorn all three memorials. Hymns in oak to the revolutionary Christ, type of Romania's martyrs, who in face of Caesars and Ceausescus rendered unto their God what was God's, and died.

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May 24, Thursday. Ascension Day. We attend a new Orthodox church in a laborers' district of Oradea. Its priest, Father Gheorghe Nemes, has sleek gray hair and warm brown eyes. Rare among Romanian priests, he has served abroad. He leads us around his church's façades, neo-Byzantine domes above caramel-painted stucco walls. Once, vineyards surrounded it. Now instead of wine, Father Nemes says, he harvests life: not *vin* but *viata* is his word-play in Romanian.

But then, irked at this congregation's health, the Ceausescu State expropriated parts of the churchyard, and put up cheap apartment blocks, stocked with *Securitate*, the secret police. But his congregation kept on growing. Many surrounding *Securitate* brought their children to him, secretly, to baptize.

Inside the church, an assistant priest and the congregation are celebrating Ascension Day Mass. Painted saints keep watch, and incense and the cantor's resonant voice surround us. Father Nemes brings from behind the altar screen another tray of consecrated bread. In a corner of the sanctuary we take a spontaneous ecumenical Ascension-Day communion—the priest, we two of the United Church of Canada, and Katalan Halasz our interpreter, an ethnic Hungarian Protestant.

Afterward in Father Nemes's office suite—in one of those adjacent apartments—we watch on television the Ascension Day service led by the Patriarch in Bucharest. Ceausescu, of course, did not allow religion on the airwaves. Father Nemes watches through happy tears. "That such an event," he exclaims, "could be broadcast in my country."

May 26, Saturday. Maramures in the central north, tucked against the Soviet border. One of Romania's most isolated districts; foreigners are rare, and life has changed little since medieval days.

At the village of Sapinta we peer over the high stone fence of a churchyard—peer onto row upon blue wooden row of tall slabs of cross-topped grave markers: The Laughing Cemetery.

We explore among the markers. On each is carved a representation of whoever lies beneath. This woman spins wool; another bends to a kitchen table. Men's occupations vary more: here are a miller, tractor-driver, miner. Many pictures show the manner of death. This woman hit by a train. A soldier cutting off this man's head. The carver shows death in gruesome detail: the severed head spurts blood. The style is naive, the perspective flat, the colors bright, the costumes traditional.

Beneath each picture, memorial doggerel has been carved, four-beat lines in rhyming couplets of Sapinta dialect. Though the verses and tableaux show life hard and unpredictable, their style—the doggerel and cartooniness—makes you laugh. One shows a doctor—white coat, stethoscope. Puzzling over the local slang we come up with this merry translation:

While on earth I played the game,
Johnny Cupca was my name.
We're each alive on earth just once;
My job as a doc was to treat earth's sons.
Some folk into health I put,
Some of their ills I made kaput.
People catch disease, alas!
They got sick—I raked in cash.

An old woman with a rag is wiping each marker. A young man in a floppy straw hat walks grave to grave reciting from memory his favorite verses. We've encountered in this graveyard material deep in Romanian character: Through their long appalling history they've kept a laughter so profound and persistent that you'd have to call it religious.

May 27, Sunday. Still in Maramures, through the mountain pass south to Baia Mare. The name means Great Bath, after the healing thermal waters beneath the city. We've come to watch the installation of Ţucian Muresan as Greek-Catholic bishop for Maramures. Of all denominations, the Communists disliked most the Western-oriented Greek-Catholics. They confiscated churches and turned many over to the Orthodox. An Orthodox congregation occupies the former Greek-Catholic cathedral in Baia Mare; and so the bishop's installation must take place outside. In the central park by a temporary platform a crowd has been gathering since dawn. Some wear Western clothes—suits and ties, dresses and nylons and heels. Others dress in their village costumes. The women of Sacel wear elf-toed high-laced moccasins. Those of Strimtina wear orange-and-black-striped aprons. Each village style is unique.

Bishops in gold-embroidered cloaks move in procession down the promenade, through these applauding crowds. Here comes the papal envoy, cheery red face and shining purple-pink gown. Smiling groups of nuns float and rustle by—float, because we cannot see their feet touch the ground beneath their habits.

After the ceremony the bishops and the priests and nuns withdraw through the streets. A drizzle begins; it has held till now. Umbrellas above and the rain-spattered lace underskirts below create about the bishops a heartwarming sense of human susceptibility. Rain falls on bishops too.

The most moving moments of this day are yet to come. Maramures villagers gather apart from the bishops. All wear their festive and distinctive village costumes. Leaders hold aloft on standards the banners of each congregation. Then, all begin to sing: an ancient folk-tune, in Phrygian-Greek mode, mournful, yet affirmative. Over and over they sing the same four lines. They march through the city center, singing. Where are they going? We follow.

They stop outside a church: their bishop's cathedral, until Ceausescu gave it to the Orthodox. They continue to sing. We notice many onlookers crying. The singers have adapted an old folk custom. When a young man is in love, villagers gather with him outside the home of his hoped-for bride to be, singing to her to come outside to join them, and to join with him in married love. Three times they march singing around her house. Here this Sunday the marchers are singing the same song: asking this church to join with them, the bride.

The post-Ceausescu government has promised to return all confiscated Greek-Catholic properties. But those of Romanian Orthodox faith have worshipped for a generation in inherited churches such as this one. In the new Romania, in time, perhaps, good will and tough negotiations may settle such matters. Till then, the villagers have gathered in the rain for a prayer and courtship, singing the old song.

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COMMONWEAL

FOR CHRISTMAS

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May 29, Tuesday. We have flown across the Carpathians to Bucharest. Here in the capital the people have placed a heroes' cemetery, burying together the Bucharest martyrs of December's revolution. At each of perhaps a hundred graves, flowers bloom inside a concrete frame, and a wooden cross tells the name of the dead; most bear a photo. Alexandru Radu Ionescu, 1972-1989. He was seventeen.

Men and women pray and tend the graves—cultivate the gardens, drape wreaths around the crosses. Some are stolid, some in tears. A man at a booth sells candles, which we light and place in sand with the hundreds of others, beneath a metal cowl. Craftsmen with hammer and chisel are at work making permanent markers, identical white slabs, one for each who died.

Twenty minutes east of the city, we cross a narrow causeway to an island in a lake: the Romanian Orthodox monastery of Cernica. Monk Ieronim Stanciu greets us. In English, Jerome. Jerome is handsome, a broad-browed man in his thirties, with glittering brown eyes and flowing hair and a beard that descends to his long black gown. Five generations of Stancius have been monks at Cernica.

Jerome brings us to lunch in the huge refectory. Smelt that the monks catch in the lake, wine from their own vineyard, bread baked here in the kitchen, aromatic soup of vegetables from the monastery garden. Jerome puts on an LP to share the meal by: choral music of communion liturgy. Not only the body, he says, should be nourished. The illustrated ceiling and walls show tableaux from Cernica's history, and from the brothers' work. Bricklaying, carpentry, prayer, and the planting of trees. While we eat, says Jerome, we must ponder what task God has given us this food for.

The monastery's museum fills Jerome with particular happiness. Here are displayed treasures of the centuries since Cernica's founding. Icons for example, painted on glass—cheery, naively painted saints, floating fantastically in perspectiveless space, like paintings of the early Chagall. Jerome whisks and plunges joyfully from room to room, showcase to showcase, from one sacred artifact to the one adjacent, leaping and pointing—"Look at this one! Look at this!"—and lecturing and telling tales of each in a tumbling mixture of English and Romanian. We've never seen such profound exuberance.

In the final room, Jerome leads us to a painting of the Apocalypse. It's huge, two meters high or more, at least three meters long. Here in oil is all of human history represented. We spot Cleopatra, and there the Marquise de Pompadour. There is Maimonides, and Krishna from the Bhagavadgita.

Largest in the middle, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Christ has arrived. He surveys the assembled. Satan and two grotesque minions cower in dismay below: Christ comes to judge. The woman who painted this began in the mid-1970s, when Ceausescu had started to grow crueller and more repressive, with more and more obvious symptoms of insanity. Christ is infinitely more than diseased historical time. Mere history is redeemed. Not just in a painting, and not in some millennial future, but now and always, says Jerome, if we have prepared ourselves.

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John Nixon, Jr.

Young Tory

Much transatlantic visiting
And always in the better castles—
Thanks to Sir Walter Scott, Dumas,
And other literary snobs—
Made bearable my otherwise
Quite Spartan boyhood. Fictional
Folks ranking lower than a baron
Did not especially intrigue
Me, though I had been introduced,
In almost democratic chapters,
To several mere knights. Perhaps
It was attraction of extremes:
Plebeian I in all that blue
Blood, swimming, diving, having one
Whale (dolphin) of a time and saving
Tale of Two Cities for the last.

Ron Overton

Match Point

It's said Beckett
in his endgame

sat and watched tennis
on tv

singles
I assume and

the irony of zero
being called love

not lost on him
I'm sure

nor the rueful
possibility

of an eternal
deuce

Ron Overton

On Larkin

You knew
to take nothing
and make a poem of it
was to find something
worth the saying of it:

the real rage
of leaden days is seen
not in these pages
but the silence
you knew

between.

Jay A. Blumenthal

The Dust Jacket at Waldenbooks

This got published? By the Oxford University Press!
And three hosannas from Donald Hall, who now
considers Gumfy as tops in the discursive lyric
(there's market niche for you!). I pore down the jacket,
absorbed by the brisk flow of credentials. Nine other
collections! A Spandolini, a MacArthur, two Guggenheims.
Essays due out in the spring. Poet-in-residence
at Codwise-on-Hudson, editor of *Regal Epiphany*,
and at 33 (he looks much older) already touted as
"the heir to the confessional tradition of Placebo
and Bootlick." I smile, unaware of the succession,
or the need for it, then thumb through the text,
all 277 pages, back to front, then front to back—
it makes no difference—stopping when I almost
spot a good line, then abruptly quitting in disgust,
convinced I've thrown away better poems. I shouldn't
be amazed by the world's strangeness. Whoever thought
that vasectomies would catch on or that my wife,
the one who limps, would marry a millionaire actor
without talent and spend three months each year
making porno movies for the American Red Cross?

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SCREEN

AT THE EDGES

'POSTCARDS' & 'TALL GUY'

Postcards from the Edge: "When he thinks, he's a child," Goethe said of Byron. Just the opposite is true of the somewhat less titanic but equally autobiographical writer, Carrie Fisher, whose screenplay, adapted from her novel, tells of an actress struggling to reform her life and reclaim her career after a near-fatal drug overdose. When Fisher feels, or at least when she portrays people trying to lay bare their feelings, she writes like a child who's been reading too many of her parents' self-help manuals. All the emotional showdowns in this movie are hollow because they contain the sort of glibly sincere language that turns all such encounters into I'm okay-you're okay therapy. Even when Meryl Streep and Dennis Quaid are exchanging insults with no intention of doing anything but lacerating each other, their aggressions are filtered through the clichés of the latest sexual politics. This would be fine if Fisher were mocking those clichés or at least showing how they muffle true emotion, but these scenes are written straight. Whenever Fisher tries to show people operating at their emotional limits, her language is too ready-made to do the job.

But whenever Carrie Fisher thinks, when she observes and mocks the phoniness of the Hollywood her actress-protagonist must deal with, she is anything but a child. She has a capital gift for satire and is expert in the art of skewering Hollywood monsters: a jaded actress who doesn't mind being treated as a whore as long as her orgasms arrive on time; a producer who protests his faith in the heroine's new sobriety but in the next breath asks for a urine sample; a British director who can't help undermining his lead actress's confidence with his smarmy praise. These and several others are struck off with the rude brio and the acute ear for idiom that Ring Lardner showed in his short stories about baseball. And, like Lardner, Fisher is at full strength when she is coldly observant, when she keeps her heart well away from her sleeve.

Director Mike Nichols responds to Fisher's felicities with complementary skill. For instance, for the scene in which Streep (whose character has always felt a simmering envy of her movie star mother's greater fame) watches a fan shower mom (Shirley MacLaine) with compliments, Nichols places the ignored young woman between the towering admirer and the posture-perfect, beaming Great Star. As the praise flows, Streep seems to sink into a little valley of mortification beneath the shoulders of votary and goddess. This is painfully funny, but what follows is even better. As Streep and MacLaine walk away, the fan, a professional female impersonator who includes the MacLaine persona in his act, remarks to his companion on the skillful face-lifts his idol has obviously undergone. He isn't being particularly catty, just professionally observant. And then the camera cuts to MacLaine who is telling Streep that she has to be gracious to drag queens who constitute her most reliable audience. So we see that the exchange wasn't all gush but research and public relations. The whole sequence is sharp stuff, with acute writing, direction, and acting meshing perfectly.

Streep is at her extremely good second best here, by which I mean she holds you with her Slavic beauty (those cheekbones! those Tartar eyes!), amazes you with her timing, dazzles you with razor-sharp emotional transitions, and never lets you forget that she is acting, acting, acting (which is precisely what she made you forget with her truly great work in *A Cry in the Dark* and *Sophie's Choice*).

MacLaine is simply at her best, and it's a new best. This domineering show-biz mother is different from her domineering socialite mother in *Terms of Endearment*. When this scared monster entertains her daughter's friends with a song and pulls out all the crowd-pleasing stops, it is the character going over the top, not MacLaine. We may cringe at the aging star's antics but we are also exhilarated by the way MacLaine uses these antics to make us understand the sort of glamorous, unstoppable engine that so many musical comedy stars become in their final years.

If this movie, fueled by so much talent, runs down in its last half hour, it is because Fisher's script puts the whole enterprise in the grip of formula. We can see where the story's events are heading long, too long, before the characters do, and in the end it feels as if your ribs have been broken by a Leo Buscaglia hug. Nichols can't resist giving us Shirley MacLaine's beaming, approving face, all aglow that her daughter has Come Through All Right.

May heartlessness take hold of Carrie Fisher. May she retain the services of Mike Nichols. These two might someday make a good, cold, funny movie containing a lot of brainy satire and peopled entirely by monsters.

Carrie Fisher sets her tale in Hollywood because she knows that place well, knows how to be funny at its expense, and can create characters that couldn't exist in any other setting. Mel Smith sets *The Tall Guy* in the world of London theater because he's out for laughs and he seems to think that London and the British theater are chock full of geeks at whom people will split their sides laughing.

Unfortunately, Mel Smith himself is something of a geek.

Proof? Here is Mr. Smith's idea of a funny-romantic conclusion. Jeff Goldblum, playing an American actor seeking his fortune in London, has lost the love of his life (Emma Thompson) by fooling around with his current leading lady. Repenting, he pursues Thompson, a dedicated nurse, to an emergency ward which is crammed with the mutilated and dying bodies recovered from a highway catastrophe. First, keep in mind that *The Tall Guy* is meant to be a light farce and not a dark comedy which could use death and suffering to make us wince as we laugh. Next, understand that in the first few shots of the scene, the bodies aren't made up in a stylized manner but are realistically gory. (Later in the scene, some bodies are made up to look ridiculous, as if the filmmakers had second thoughts while shooting.)

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As Nurse Emma furiously labors to save the lives of survivors, Goldblum makes his romantic pitch. Since Thompson is understandably too frazzled to listen, Goldblum decides to prove his worthiness by helping her give artificial respiration to a victim whose pulse rate has just gone flatline. They succeed. The rest of the victims arise from their beds to urge Thompson to give her lover another chance. She does. Applause. Kiss. The End. Need I review the rest of this movie?

It would be nice to think that the radically untalented Smith will disappear from the moviemaking scene by some process of natural attrition, but I wouldn't bet the ranch on it. He has no aptitude with camera or actors but he does know how to con good actors into a project unworthy of them. Rowan Atkinson, the magnificent Black Adder on P.B.S., even manages to give a halfway funny performance as an egomaniacal actor. And Smith had one comic idea that almost survives his bungled execution: the hero stars in a musical comedy version of *The Elephant Man*. But, reader, if you sat down right now and dashed off a comic travesty of *The Elephant Man*, I'm sure you would get at least three more laughs out of whatever audience you cared to show it to than Smith got from the audience I was sitting in.

No, Mel Smith will be around. He may even turn up someday in a Carrie Fisher novel. RICHARD ALLEVA

STAGE

CREATURES ALL

'SPECIES' & 'MOSES'

Martha Clarke's *Endangered Species* begins when one member of the company crawls diagonally across the large stage at BAM's Majestic Theater (the patented Clarke crawl) and ends when the company is gunned down by unidentified assailants—offstage sound. Not quite the ending actually. The final image is of Jack, the talented Clydesdale performer, moving in a circle around the improvised ring (the dirt bed of *The Hunger Artist* as Fibar, Inc.'s version of circus sawdust) with the company bunched grayly in a group, slowly following him, exiting as the horse passes them and keeps going. There is vitality in the animal, none in the humans. It is clear that we are Clarke's endangered species.

The piece, as usual with Clarke, consists of nonlinear presentation of shifting images. They are of two kinds primarily. Long, slow walks across the acting space, pregnant pauses, lingering looks of longing or lust or horror. The others are more physical, more violent—falls, chases, trapeze swings, vaultings on and off Mr. Grey, a Percheron so well trained that he could let a performer on his back simulate sex withhout turning a horse hair. The performer in this case is Lisa Dalton, who in a later extended scene with Alistair Butler turns into the victim as rag doll. At least, I assume that these were the two performers but they, like the other humans in the cast, are identified only as members of the company, presumably on the assumption that it is the group not the individuals who provide the total effect. Clarke's images are accompanied and enhanced by music that ranges from "We'll Meet Again" to "Stabat Mater"; by passages from Walt Whitman adapted by Robert Coe; and by Paul Gallo's lighting.

Much of the advance publicity for *Endangered Species* concerned the animals that Clarke was adding to her company. The giraffe, teasingly promised early in the process, never materialized at all (too expensive, the Music-Theatre Group's Lyn Austin told me), and several animals listed in the program—Bert (the goat), for instance, and Tony (the capuchin monkey)—never made it to the stage. By the opening, the nonhuman cast had dwindled to four—Flora Baldini, the elephant, and three horses (Jack, Mr. Grey, and Mike, a miniature). Flora, who was allowed one cute bit—the closing of a door—for her curtain call, is used as a mysterious figure who passes regally across the stage, seen through the doors that open at the back. The horses are sometimes led portentously around the ring, sometimes put through routines that are probably from their Circus Flora acts, as when Mike sits daintily on the edge of the bed that is the piece's main prop.

The circus can be an image of pain (see *The Hunger Artist*), but it is conventionally an occasion for joy—an emotion that seems to be at odds with Clarke's controlling idea here. Still, the animals are clearly intended as a contrast to the humans, holders of secrets that human beings do not know. This is made clear when an actor moves through the fallen bodies at the end and speaks Whitman's lines, "I think I could turn and live with the animals." Coe dropped a line from that section ("Not one kneels to another..."), perhaps because we have learned enough about animal behavior since Whitman's time to know that animals do bow, after their fashion, to the dominant one in a group. A friend of mine, watching me write the review, said that I mentioned this change only to indicate that I had read Whitman, but the alteration here is symptomatic of the misuse of Whitman. The poet never serves Clarke's theme as the animals do. Both Clarke's images and Whitman's lines are full of rape, murder, suicide, war; but Whitman's poem is finally celebratory, Clarke's piece darkly foreboding. On the night that I saw *Species*, Michael J. Anderson's voice broke on the words "barbaric yawp." Perhaps it was intentional; it should have been.

Although the ending of *Endangered Species* was affecting, it never had the force of the last scene in Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses and Aron* at the City Opera. The power of Schoenberg's music and the performances of Richard Cross (Moses) and Thomas Young (Aron) turn a theological quarrel—the invisible God vs. a God made manifest in images—into a heartbreaking personal struggle. This Moses is not forbidden entry into the land of milk and honey. Unable to accept what Aron has done to his vision ("I bow down to necessity," sings the worldly brother), Moses refuses to follow the Israelites and Aron through the door at the back that opens onto a pastel paradise, the one touch of color (the sacrificial

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blood of the orgy scene, aside) in the white/gray settings and costumes provided by Achim Freyer.

Moses and Aron is a static opera—dramatically, not musically. Hans Neugebauer, the director, solves that problem with an abstract production. Freyer's set is a large white box fronted by a scrim curtain. God becomes a small square of light that penetrates the curtain, presented first and most effectively when Cross comes quite close to it, framing his inspired and slightly demented Moses in a large-theater equivalent of the close-up—the prophet whose eyes predict the ending. All the players are dressed in white, their faces chalked, and they fall into tableaux which suggest George Segal statuary groups and remain unmoving while the music carries the action. Oddly, the orgy scene, in which there is more business than anywhere else in the opera, is the least effective one. Partly that is Schoenberg's fault, for it breaks down into a kind of catalogue of orgiastic doings without the firm through line that carries the other scenes. Overall, however, *Moses and Aron* is wonderfully effective as theater. Moses' defeat, partly self-inflicted, weighs heavily at the end, but there is still the promise of paradise, however compromised by human limitations, that not even the presence of Flora can give to *Endangered Species*.

GERALD WEALES

BOOKS

The marrow of the bone

IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS
The Death and Life of a Parish Priest
Paul Wilkes
Random House, $19.95, 234 pp.

William di Canzio

By writing well about one person in very particular circumstances, Paul Wilkes has said something worth listening to about American Catholicism and about human life shaped by faith.

He originally planned "to do a documentary film and a book—a modern-day corollary to Georges Bernanos's spiritual classic, *The Diary of a Country Priest*—following a parish priest as he lived his last days. Bernanos's fictional portrait of a dying priest in a small, obscure French village had always fascinated and troubled me, revealing as it did such towering heroism in the midst of numbing banality." Heroism—in the midst of banality and otherwise—is part of what Wilkes's own work is about.

With what strikes me as great artistic chutzpah, Wilkes wrote to the Boston archdiocese asking to be put in touch with fatally ill priests, and then dumped his original plan when he met a superior subject, Joe Greer, pastor of Saint Patrick's in Natick. Though Greer had been diagnosed with bone marrow cancer, after a year's chemotherapy he was hoping to be told soon that the disease was in total remission. So Wilkes decided "to write about a healthy, working priest, [rather] then to seek one who fulfilled my 'country priest' specifications."

The first half of *In Mysterious Ways* introduces us to Greer and his world. A ruddy, handsome, fifty-five-year old of Irish extraction, Greer had a few years ago accepted the pastorship of Saint Patrick's, with eighty-five hundred members. "At one time being its pastor was considered a dream assignment," Wilkes writes. "For decades the pastor of Saint Patrick's had five full-time assistant priests and commanded, by position if not by birth, the kind of respect customarily reserved for Boston's upper class." That all had changed. When Greer was first offered Saint Patrick's, the pastor had two, not five, assistant priests, a staff soon to be reduced to one; moreover, Saint Patrick's was "tired, a parish *in extremis*," financially languishing, liturgically comatose, its grade school and convent empty, its neglected church upstaged by "a huge billboard advertising bingo." Greer, who had just refurbished another parish, turned it down. But on deeper consideration, he accepted. "I realized the church had been pretty good to me," he says, "I felt it was time to give something back." It's clear to the reader that Greer has already been "giving back" for most of his professional life. He succeeds in turning Saint Patrick's around.

While Wilkes quotes epigraphically from *Country Priest* at the top of every chapter, his writing has less in common with Bernanos's scorching introspection than it does with his own documentary films (the fine TV biography of Merton is his) and with the work of such masters of nonfiction as Joan Didion and John McPhee, with whom in ways he may be favorably compared. He listens closely to characteristic speech and presents it intact, as when the pastor describes his parishioners: "old townies and the swinging liberals, senior citizens and the high-tech crowd out there on Route 128, the Blue Army bunch who think Vatican II is heresy and the Virgin Mary is popping up all over the world, twenty-five-year-old kids who wear scapulars and prolifers ready to excommunicate everybody." Or when a former seminary classmate tells my favorite Greer story: "He used his elbows in basketball, and when he tagged you in touch football, you knew it. But when we were choosing up for a game and one of those wimpy guys was left, Joe would always take him.... Nobody in his right mind would throw the ball to him, and there was Joe, lofting [him] a sweet little pass.... Of course it bounced off his head. And Joe would go over, toss his arm around the guy's shoulder, and apologize for throwing a bum pass." Wilkes also has

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a knack for showcasing facts and figures, so that we marvel at them rather than glide over so much statistical information: Greer's salary, for example, "top scale in the archdiocese, $851 a month." The writer knows what he's doing, keeping the sum low by overlooking substantial benefits; nevertheless it contrasts strikingly with the $600,000 we learn was recently spent to "refurbish" the chapel in the residence of Cardinal Bernard Law.

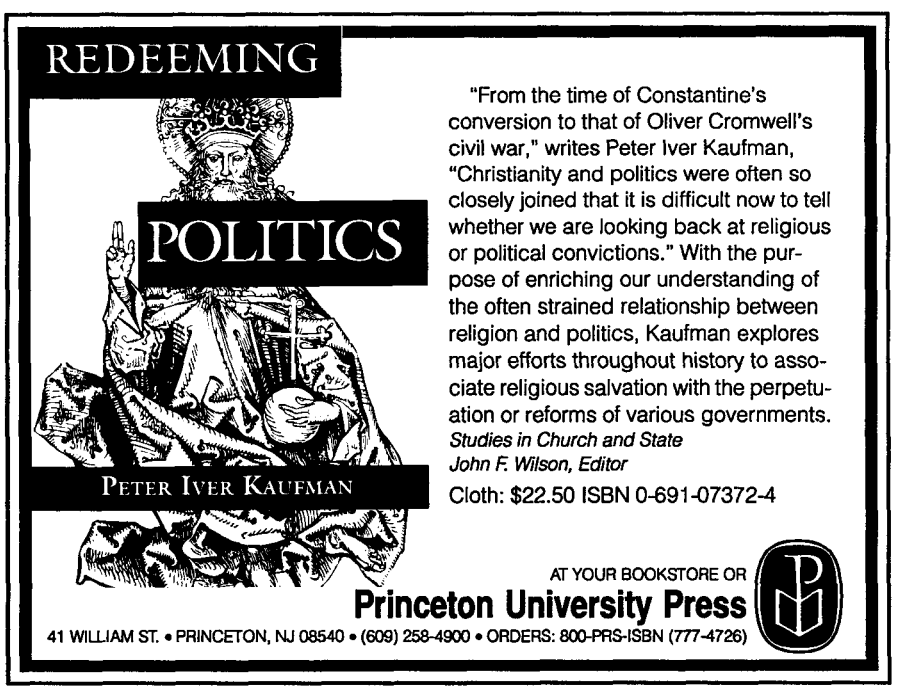
It's through the details of Joe Greer's life that Wilkes makes his statement about larger issues, but his argument is clear: "[Greer's] age—about the median age of American priests today—and the state of his parish are indicative of the present-day situation (some would call it a crisis) within the Catholic church." The shortage of priests contributes to understaffing, overwork, depression, and burn-out, and this argument is convincingly buttressed not only by what we see at Saint Patrick's, but by interviews with archdiocesan officials as well. The writer has done his homework.

In Mysterious Ways is a book of surprises and ironies. Today's young seminarians at Saint John's, for example, Greer's alma mater, speak a trendy jargon that seems at odds with reactionary attitudes: "their idealistic faces...harden at the mention of issues currently at the center of church debate," such as the ordination of women. Greer, on the other hand, who appears to be so completely the company-man, does not recite the party line when he speaks up about clerical celibacy, *Humanae vitae*, or the hierarchy. But the book's pivotal irony, reflected in its structure and subtitle, *The Death and Life of a Parish Priest*, is that Greer's cancer eventually reasserts itself virulently; he does indeed become like the "country priest" whom Wilkes had originally sought, and he is made to face death armed with unanticipated weapons.

Cancer takes command in the second half of *Mysterious Ways*, the way cancer can take over someone's life. Medical science offers a marrow transplant, but in order for the procedure to work, the patient must nearly die. Greer is sealed in a coffin-like box and repeatedly assaulted with radiation whose total amount killed workers and firemen at Chernobyl. While Greer had come to the hospital secure in faith and prepared for an ordeal leading either to a quick death or the "resurrection" of restored health—such a serene patient that his doctors feel that he ministers to them as much as they to him—he discovers that there was no way to prepare for what would happen: the ghastly realities of his body's violent revolt against the poisons of the treatment, and the mental and spiritual consequences—depression, inability to pray, even hallucinations, loss of reason, and, finally, a sense of failure with his incomplete recovery, as if he were himself responsible for it. "Father Greer had constantly maintained that he was not afraid to die. Now the question was: was he equally unafraid to live if it meant living in this reduced state? He had wanted a miracle—who could blame him?—and it had not happened."

. By acknowledging *Country Priest* as his model, Wilkes courageously, if tacitly, invites comparison with Bernanos's masterpiece, which received the *Grand Prix* of the *Académie Française* shortly after publication in 1936. In most ways, it's fairer and more useful to contrast them, for Bernanos was writing a work of fiction, and his hero, the unnamed curé d'Ambricourt, has more in common artistically with Stephen Daedalus than with Joe Greer. Unlike the curé, Greer is endowed neither with the glamour of youth, nor with the romance of stunning dialogue and great scenes. Nor does Greer's illness offer the glory of a death which claims him quickly, as does the curé's, who is able to echo Thérèse of Lisieux with his last breath, "All is grace." What Greer does share with the melancholy young hero, though, is a profound spiritual value, what I would call faithfulness to his own truth. Greer's ordained priesthood, flawed by his sinfulness, besieged by his parishioners, imposed on by his superiors, held in contempt by the world at large, is what he proves, in his life and in his "death," to be the essential truth of his nature, his role in the reign of Christ, and he clings to it in faith, even when he himself may feel that faith is gone.

Like all worthwhile books, *In Mysterious Ways* grows in significance as we reflect on it. If Saint Patrick's in Natick is representative of contemporary American parochial life, then I would suggest that Father Greer, returning to his parish, lonely, with his confidence and vitality radically compromised by the disease—and by over thirty years of service—is representative of the secular clergy today and of the afflicted authoritarian system. "In the past, Father Greer had been humbled by his failings and had become a better, more compassionate priest because of them. But the inner deficiencies had not shown. Now there was no way of hiding." □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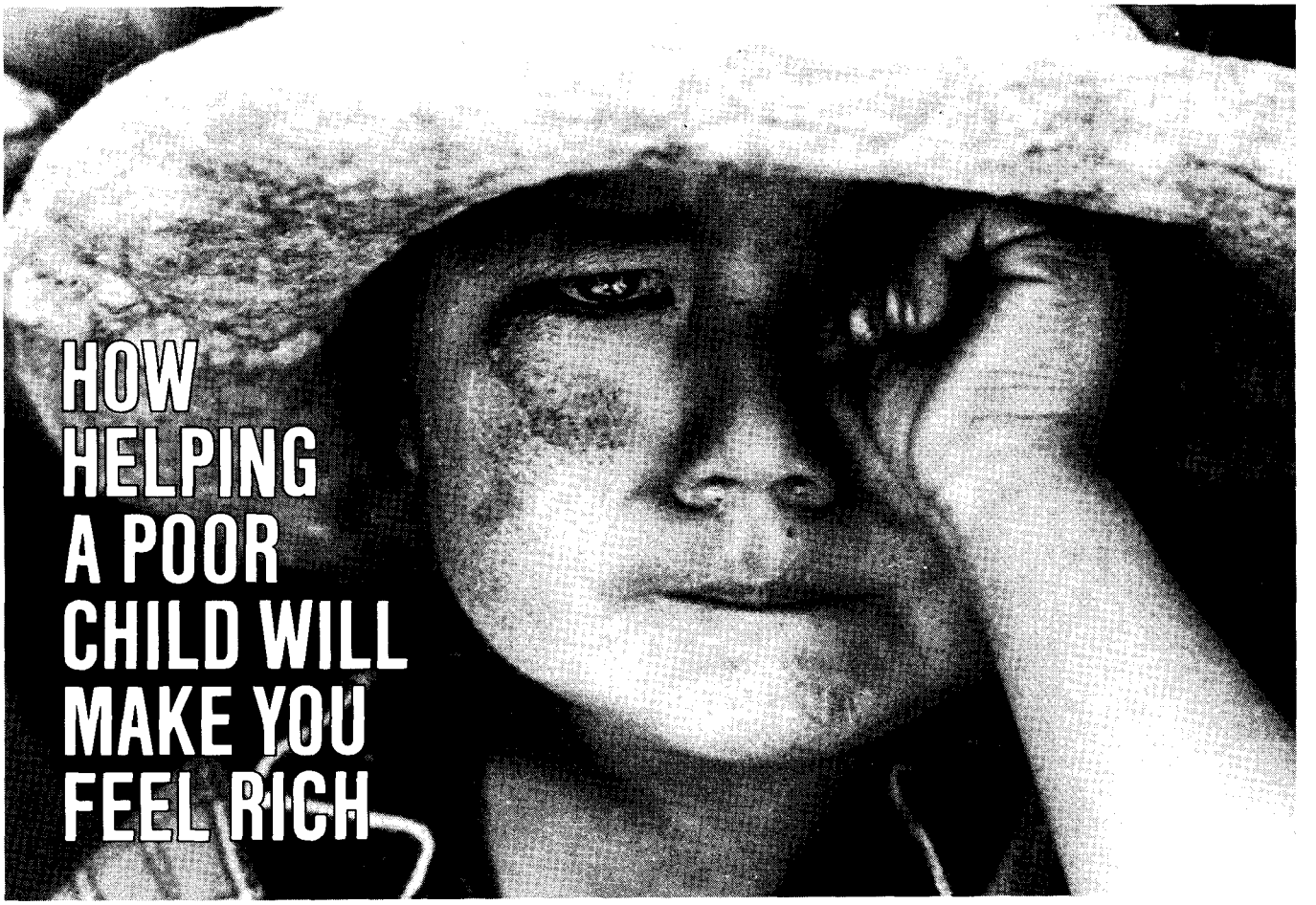

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INTEGRATION: THE LOST IDEAL

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA
Origins and Development of National Policy—1960-1972
Hugh Davis Graham
Oxford, $29.95, 578 pp.

THE CLOSEST OF STRANGERS
Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York
Jim Sleeper
Norton, $21.95, 345 pp.

Fred Siegel

The great forgotten fact of America's recent racial history is that the ideal of integration was eclipsed almost as soon as it was established. Detroit's plight illustrates the point. Detroit had been in the forefront during the racial reform of the 1960s. Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh had initiated a "war on poverty" even before LBJ had launched his. Mayor of what was then a predominantly white city with a sizable minority of both black poor and well-to-do black auto workers, Cavanaugh brought African-Americans into prominent positions in government, and increased funding for the schools and public housing. Detroit, said the *New York Times* as the 1967 riots began, "probably had more going for it than any other major city in the North."

Detroit has never recovered from its riot, the worst in the nation's history. Dozens were killed and President Lyndon Johnson was forced to send in federal troops to restore order. Whites fled. Within six years, and before the sharp decline of the auto industry, Detroit was transformed from a prosperous and potentially integrated city into an economically depressed and almost all-black city.

In anticipation of what full-fledged "multiculturalism" promises to bring for the future, the black city and its white suburbs now view each other as armed and hostile camps. In 1973, Detroit's newly elected black mayor Coleman Young declared war on the suburbs. It's turned out, at least for Detroit, to be a war of attrition as the city has lost nearly half its population. Sections of the city have returned to prairie. For their part, self-satisfied suburbanites, confirmed in their sense of total separation, feel no need to help. The surrounding suburban counties now bill themselves as Southeastern Michigan rather than Greater Detroit. "We view the values of the people of Detroit," says Richard Sabaugh, a county commissioner from neighboring Warren, "as completely foreign." "There is no feeling of pity for Detroit in the suburbs."

Two powerful though very different new books help explain how it was that integration was never given a chance to work. Hugh Davis Graham's *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy—1960-1972* is a heavily documented, blow-by-blow account of how integration was slowly subverted by subtle shifts in bureaucratic policy making. Jim Sleeper's *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York* is a searing, sweeping account of the rise of racial separatism in New York.

Graham, a scholar at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, carefully traces the development of the mechanisms for enforcing civil rights law from their origins in the New Deal's toothless Fair Employment Practice Commission (FEPC) on to the legally well-armed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) of the Nixon years. Up until the 1960s civil rights enforcement efforts were hampered by the case-by-case approach. Taking on racist practices one victim at a time meant slow progress in achieving voting and other civil rights. But with the landmark 1964 Omnibus Civil Rights Bill a variety of federal agencies including the EEOC were armed with sweeping new powers modeled on the New Deal's National Labor Relations Board. These powers enabled civil rights agencies to investigate, hold hearings, and, most important, issue sweeping orders covering not just individual instances, but whole categories of cases, all of which was enforceable in court.

This should have been an unadulterated triumph. But instead, as Graham painstakingly traces it through the back halls of the bureaucracy and into the courts and back, the victories over old-fashioned racism have been accompanied by a new racialism which insists on defining individuals by their ascribed characteristic. The legal staffs of the federal agencies moved steadily away from the color-blind ideals of the early civil rights movement, in which as Martin Luther King, Jr., put it, a man was to be judged "by the content of his character rather than the color of his skin," toward the race-conscious policies of quotas and proportional representation.

Graham's story of bureaucratic intrigue and judicial overreaching lays bare the process whereby the 1964 civil rights act, a monument to the integrationist ideal, which explicitly barred racial quotas, was turned into an instrument, not for the kind of affirmative action which reaches out to be inclusive but for racial classifications. As such Graham's book is essential reading for anyone trying to understand the current conflict over the Kennedy-Hawkins bill, a piece of legislation that would serve to institutionalize racial quotas and the divisiveness that accompanies them, for all forms of hiring and promotion.

Since the late 1960s, racial redress has slid down the slippery slope which began with affirmative action designed to bring minorities into the mainstream, moved on to separate criteria for jobs or college admissions quotas, and has now arrived at a cultural and political separatism that threatens the viability of our colleges and cities. If as the demagogic Chicago Congressman Gus Savage suggests, "white is never right," black and white have no choice but to confront each other over a chasm of racial/cultural incomprehension.

In *The Closest of Strangers*, Jim Sleeper, an editorial writer for *New York Newsday*, has written a compelling account of how racialism has helped shatter the common culture of New York, a culture which, despite the stain of a residual racism, was once heavily infused with social democrat-

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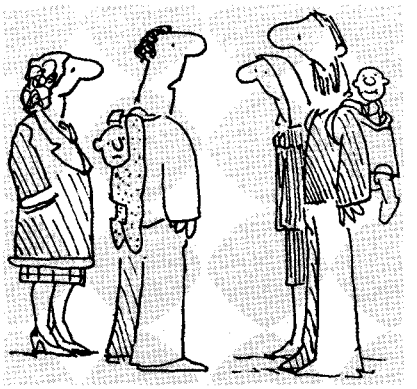
ic ideals. Overwrought at times, Sleeper's book will no doubt infuriate many. But Sleeper, who has a passionate attachment not only to New York but to the old left's ideals of both racial justice and transnationalism, has written a tour de force. It lays bare the consequences of a racialized politics which insists on equating race with culture. That equation sometimes makes it difficult for New Yorkers of different races to converse, let alone partake of shared ideals.

Sleeper, and here before I go further I should note that I am among those thanked in the preface, has a sharp eye for the complexities of New York. Withering in his criticism of racist practices by landlords who have made fortunes by fomenting racial fear, he also explores the way in which the threat of crime committed by blacks has curdled the commitments of even racially tolerant New Yorkers. Sleeper's primary target, however, is neither the landlords nor newly minted upscale Archie Bunkers, but racial racketeers like the infamous trio of Mason, Maddox, and Sharpton who perpetrated the Tawana



"That reminds me—the strap broke on ours. I must get it repaired."

Brawley hoax. In a particularly devastating section, he describes how the trio and their white apologists like lawyer William Kunstler asserted that in the name of a race-based morality the mere facts of the matter were irrelevant in the Brawley case. The facts, argued Kunstler and writers for the *Nation*, had to give way before the racial resentments which gave the Brawley story a tribal if not an objective realty.

The polemical fireworks aside, *The Closest of Strangers* can be read as an explanation of how America's quarter-century experiment with full-scale moral deregulation has been every bit as much a disaster as the financial deregulation which has left us with the S & L collapse.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the cop, the social worker, and the teacher, each of whom patrolled his or her own beat in the name of middle- and working-class morality essential for success in a technological society, were withdrawn from the lives of the very poor. Denounced as though they were agents of an external colonial power, their departure left the working poor exposed to the tender mercies of the criminal classes. The consequences are all around us as the working poor, who watched as virtue went unrewarded by the Republicans and vice unpunished by the Democrats, were increasingly pulled into the downward spiral.

American culture today is, if not universal, transnational. Too many diverse people have lived together for too long for our cultures not to have rubbed off on each other. The pluralism preached by the proponents of racial integration made room

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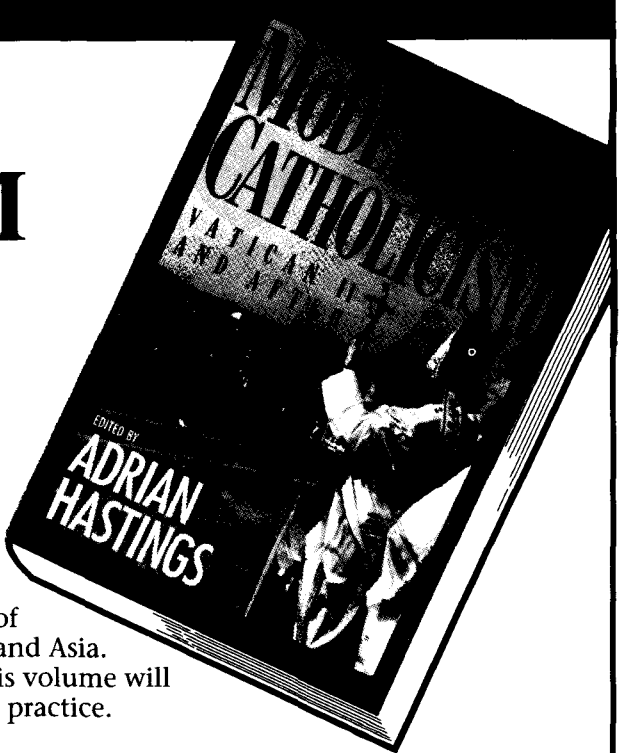

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for the complexities of the hyphenated identities most of us bear as descendants of different ethnic and religious heritages. But at the same time as it incorporated the diversity of different identities, it called in the public sphere for the shared standards essential for citizenship. What the social breakdowns of our cities suggest is that the call for both tolerance and integration is as essential now as it was twenty-five years ago at the height of the civil rights movement. □

A DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT

THE BURNING SEASON
The Murder of Chico Mendes and the Fight for the Amazon Rain Forest
Andrew Revkin
Houghton Mifflin, $19.95, 317 pp.

THE WORLD IS BURNING
Murder in the Rain Forest
Alex Shoumatoff
Little, Brown, $19.95, 377 pp.

Joseph A. Page

In a certain sense, the assassination of Chico Mendes on December 22, 1988, was unremarkable. During the 1970s and 1980s, land and labor conflicts throughout rural Brazil took hundreds of lives. Mendes was yet another victim in a prolonged struggle for social justice.

But the case of Mendes turned out to be special. His intelligence and charisma had made him not only a leader of the rubber tappers who live off the rain forest in the western Amazon basin, but also an effective advocate abroad, where he was soliciting help in the struggle to stop the destruction of the forests. This put him on a collision course with ranchers who stood to suffer financially from his efforts to organize forest dwellers and persuade the government to set aside large tracts of land as extractive reserves. His alliance with activists, both in Brazil and abroad, who saw in the deforestation of the Amazon basin an ecological disaster with global repercussions, made him an international figure—which did not, however, protect him from becoming Brazil's first ecological martyr. His death ignited worldwide outrage.

There is a good deal of drama in the life story of Mendes, a genuine up-from-the-ranks hero who went from tapping wild rubber trees to involvement in left-wing politics, and thence to an embrace of environmentalism as a tactic for defending the way of life of trappers, Indians, and others for whom the Amazon's tropical forest is a treasure to be cherished rather than an obstacle to be burned.

Yet the story of Mendes is but one part of a larger, more complex canvas, encompassing the single-minded quest of the Brazilian people to achieve the greatness they view as their rightful destiny. Driving to exploit the natural resources and hydroelectric potential of the Amazon basin (an enterprise in part fueled by concern, bordering on paranoia, that if they fail to act, they will eventually lose the wealth of the Amazon basin to foreigners), they have created interrelated social and ecological problems of mind-boggling proportions.

In order to populate the region, various Brazilian governments launched ambitious road-building programs and colonization schemes. Refugees from the drought-lashed northeast and rural workers from the south who had lost their jobs to machines did not need much encourage-

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ment. They streamed into the new promised land. But speculators had already begun to grab up property along the new roads, and big corporations took advantage of tax incentives to create large cattle ranches in the region. Bloody land conflicts inevitably ensued.

The migrants also discovered to their dismay that the soil in the Amazon basin is generally ill-suited for agriculture. They burned and cleared plots of land, planted crops that failed, and then moved on to other plots where they repeated the process. The devastation caused by these newcomers and by ranchers seeking to convert rain forest into pasture for cattle threatens to turn the Amazon basin into a wasteland, and has ominous implications for worldwide weather patterns.

At the same time hordes of gold prospectors were invading the Amazon. They extracted untold wealth from hills and streams, but also inflicted untold damage by dumping mercury, a deadly environmental contaminant, into the region's waterways.

The burning and polluting of the rain forest, the flooding of vast areas as a result of the construction of dams, and the high risk of disease and violent death at the hands of invading colonists threaten to exterminate the remaining tribal Indians in the region. This process also endangers the livelihood of the rubber trappers of the western Amazon.

Taking advantage of interest generated by the Mendes tragedy, Andrew Revkin's *The Burning Season* and Alex Shoumatoff's *The World Is Burning* focus upon the role of Mendes and the rubber trappers in the fight to save the Amazon rain forest. Both volumes recognize the complexities of the struggle. Revkin conveys them somewhat less fully, which makes *The Burning Season* an easier read. Shoumatoff does not shrink from snarls and uncertainties, which give his book an unruly air.

Revkin, an environmental journalist, is at his best describing the phenomena that make the Amazon basin one of the natural wonders of the planet, and the devastating effects of deforestation. His account of the career of Mendes is straightforward and compelling. He examines in depth the relationship between Mendes and environmental activists both in Brazil and the United States, and the contribution of international banks to the destruction of the forest by approving loans for the construction of roads in the Amazon basin.

Revkin's weakness stems from his unfamiliarity with Brazil, its language and psychology. His book also suffers from the lack of an index and the capricious misplacement (or omission) of accent marks.

Shoumatoff, with several previous works on Brazil to his credit, peppers his account with stunning insights into "Brazilian-ness," a phenomenon too often ignored by foreigners concerned with the fate of the Amazon. (For example, he relates how some Brazilians confuse reality with the televised "soap operas" they avidly watch; when Mendes was murdered, there were those who thought that the killer was one of the characters on the most widely viewed program of the day.) He understands that in Brazil "so many things...conspire against the vision of a stable, fixed

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reality. It's different down there."

Yet his book exasperates as much as it delights, if not more so. Often rambling and disorganized, it tells us more than we need to know about the author's adventures in investigating the story, and at times reads like hastily edited transcriptions from his diary. He also devotes excessive attention to peripheral matters, such as the sordid squabble over film rights to the life of Mendes.

Recent developments in Brazil suggest some hope that the rain forest will be exploited rationally. An environmentalist has been placed in charge of the federal environmental protection agency and the government is taking stern steps to stop indiscriminate deforestation.

Revkin explains more clearly how this apparent turning point has been reached. Shoumatoff provides a needed dose of skepticism, and gives a better sense of how difficult it will be, in light of Brazil's social and economic problems, to achieve a long-term solution in the Amazon basin. □

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WRITER ON THE STUMP

THE GENERAL IN HIS LABYRINTH
Gabriel García Márquez
Alfred A. Knopf, $19.95, 285 pp.

Lee Siegel

Few writers since the beginning of modernism's long slow decline have had such a distinct fictional vision as García Márquez. What some critics neatly refer to as his "magical realism" seems no less than an attempt at historical redemption—extreme imaginative acts meant to retrieve a civilization from an ongoing explosion of extreme events. His trademark metaphor—the solitude his characters wear like a crown of ice—is endlessly expansive. His very paragraphs are Promethean: they characteristically present the beginning and the end of an episode before its telling, as if the author never stopped wanting to show his contempt for time as a transparent artifice.

At first glance the subject of this latest novel, a poetically compressed account of Simon Bolívar's life, might seem to be the *pièce de résistance* for such a large literary appetite. The "Liberator," who drove Spain off the South American peninsula, is not only the most important figure in Latin American history, but in many ways the embodiment of the history of Colombia, García Márquez's native land and fictional turf. After carving the country out of Spanish New Granada, the general reigned as its first president—dictator, actually, and of Peru and Bolivia as well—and held it together for as long as he could before it lapsed into civil war and Venezuela and Ecuador seceded from the new republic. Such a career casts a dense symbolic shadow.

The General in His Labyrinth traces Bolívar's desperate last months. Beginning with his renunciation of the Colombian presidency, it follows him on his trip up the Magalena River to the Caribbean coast, where he intends to board a ship for Europe, convinced that his absence will calm the growing factional turmoil. Yet at the port he learns that his close friend and political heir, Antonio José de Sucre, has been assassinated by a rival party, and plunged into grief, he abandons his European plans and starts to head back to Bogotá to shore up the faltering government there. Throughout both legs of his journey he watches bitterly as his vision of a unified continent disintegrates around him; to make matters worse, he is disintegrating as well, slowly being wasted by tuberculosis. Nevertheless, his spirit still afloat on the strength of his illusions, he recalls the people and events of his life: military campaigns and political intrigues; the men who fought under him; Manuela Saenz, his extravagantly willful lover; "countless" indifferent sexual encounters; the ruthless acts he committed in war, which he does not regret. Before he reaches Bogotá he dies, on a plantation owned, ironically, by a Spanish friend.

The situation seems ripe for García Márquez's celebrated wand. Unfortunately, he waves it with half a heart. You soon wonder why the author, who re-created Colombian history so savagely and magnificently in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—the character of Colonel Aureliano Buendia in that novel bears a strong resemblance to Bolívar—now covers similar ground in mostly factual terms, despite significant fictional liberties. It's a little like Tolstoy publishing an account of Napoleon's exploits after writing *War and Peace*. But García Márquez is in the grip of some extra-literary passions (it happened to Tolstoy, too) and the result is a disappointingly weak book.

Of course there is, as there always is with García Márquez, some beautiful writing. One passage, as intensely illuminating as an epiphany, has the dying Bolívar staying the night in a strange house during a terrible storm. As he lies in bed a group of children stand outside his window in a torrential rain and watch him sleep.

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One of them woke him with a whispered "Bolívar, Bolívar."

He searched for him through the mists of fever, and the boy asked:

"Do you love me?"

The General assented with a tremulous smile, but then he ordered the chickens wandering through the house to be chased out, the children made to leave, and the windows closed....

The question, posed through the storm of history, is at the heart of García Márquez's fiction, where its various fantastic rebuffs can destroy civilizations and leave them to the birds. The general, who married war after the death of his young bride, is momentarily swept up into the dark logic of García Márquez's world and his loveless destiny made to crystallize along its lines.

But the poetry remains strangely unmoored. For at the same time, García Márquez is so earnest about showing the literal facts of Bolívar's life that the novel's two levels—real and invented—never intersect. What we get instead is a very busy narrator, as busy as any world leader, carrying on long-distance conversations with two different categories of existence simultaneously. It is as if García Márquez regrets, as Bolívar himself came to lament, his inability to press his vision onto history, and intends to set the matter straight by direct negotiations between his imagination and actual events.

Fiction, though, cannot bear too much actuality and the novel breaks under the strain. The widest cracks appear in the dialogue, never García Márquez's strong suit and barely present in his other work. Far too much of it fills the pages of *The General in His Labyrinth*, and the pasteboard characters speak with a you-are-there-in-the-midst-of-greatness quality familiar from Hollywood biographies. (The original Spanish is no better.)

Worse, portions of the novel read as if they had been lifted from a book of trivia: "...some eight thousand documents with [Bolívar's] signature have been preserved." Others are just plain confusing, mere facts lying in clusters, as if under siege from the intermittent poetry.

Lacking fictional depth, García Márquez's preoccupations have never been so plainly exposed. The symbolically bad weather won't let up; nature gains on decaying civilization on nearly every page; the scatological jokes that were so tenderly played on high ideals in *Love in the Time of Cholera* are annoyingly overdone. Phrases such as "the magic of his person," "the wisdom of his heart had taught him the vanity of glory," "he was starting out on the return trip to the void" are like reinforcements summoned from the other novels that are just too weak to fight. By tale's end, the Garcíamárquesan images of gold, mirrors, and ice litter the battlefield.

It is perhaps Bolívar's greatest victory, this vanquishing of such a splendid writer. García Márquez's singular fictional universe ends up getting transmuted into fact, not the other way round. For ultimately the author stretches a foot out of his alchemist's realm onto the podium. García Márquez's politics have always been voluble and controversial, but this is the first time he has pronounced on the issues of the day, such as debt, in the pages of a

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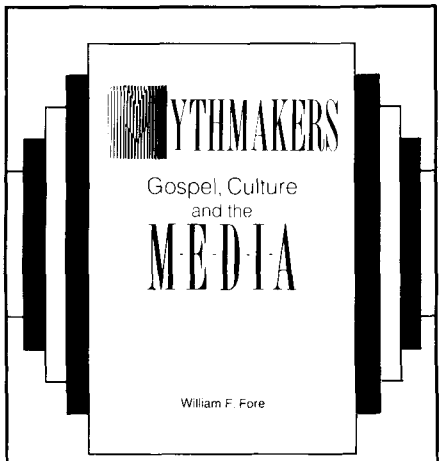

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novel. He doesn't bring it off. Elsewhere he angrily fabricates an angry general justifying to a contentious French visitor his decision to execute eight hundred Spanish prisoners and hospital patients in one day, on the grounds that the Europeans do that sort of thing, too, so they have no right to criticize. This from the author who once reimagined Colombia's interminable bloody war between liberals and conservatives with merciless irony and disgust.

"Art is the lie that discloses the truth," Picasso said. Having put his art aside and adopted a public voice, García Márquez has misrepresented his own mythic domain as well as the insufficiently real world he has up to now so marvelously revealed and completed. Vargas Llosa ran for president of Peru; Colombians got *The General in His Labyrinth.*

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Simon and Schuster, $21.95, 483 pp.

Gordon C. Zahn

Canonization is a notoriously difficult obstacle course whose logic and procedures are sometimes as dubious as they are arcane. Just how difficult canonization can be is made clear in *Newsweek* senior writer Kenneth L. Woodward's detailed description and analysis of the procedures and processes employed by the "saint-makers," the congregation for the Causes of Saints, in Rome. Given what seems to have been his virtually "open" access to congregation personnel and documentary evidence, anyone harboring ambitions for becoming a viable candidate (a lack of humility that in itself would probably be disqualifying) is advised to study this book well.

Not least of its virtues are the profound and sometimes troubling questions it raises in the reader's mind. How appropriate, for instance, is any attempt to subject the Holy Spirit's special gifts and graces of heroic virtue to the rigidities of bureaucratic classifications and formulations? Yet how else could it be done? Recent changes in the approach to and conduct of investigation from the strictly legalistic/theological to a more historical mode of inquiry (with the function of the "devil's advocate" abandoned in the shuffle) are significant improvements; even so, one is left with the suspicion that the successful causes are not always or necessarily the most deserving.

The earliest saints were "canonized" by popular acceptance. Not all, one assumes not even most, would meet today's more stringent tests. Nevertheless, they did what saints are supposed to do, providing both an inspirational model to guide others to spiritual perfection and eternal salvation and intercessionary channels for divine assistance in times of need. Since 1588, with the founding of the congregation, selection has been formalized and the more recent attribution of papal infallibility to the results of its work (but not extending, strangely enough, to the miracles or other claims upon which the decisions may have been based) has complicated the task. In some respects the original system may have been better and more in keeping with Jesus' own reluctance to assign positions of special prestige or priority in heaven during his own lifetime.

There are other problems. It is well known the extent to which the intimidating costs involved (first in promoting the case and then in arranging for the actual canonization ceremonies) can load the dice in favor of religious orders, diocesan structures, and (less often today, perhaps, than in the past) positions of wealth and secular power. Insider favoritism can play too decisive a role as Woodward's account of the tremendous push behind the cause of

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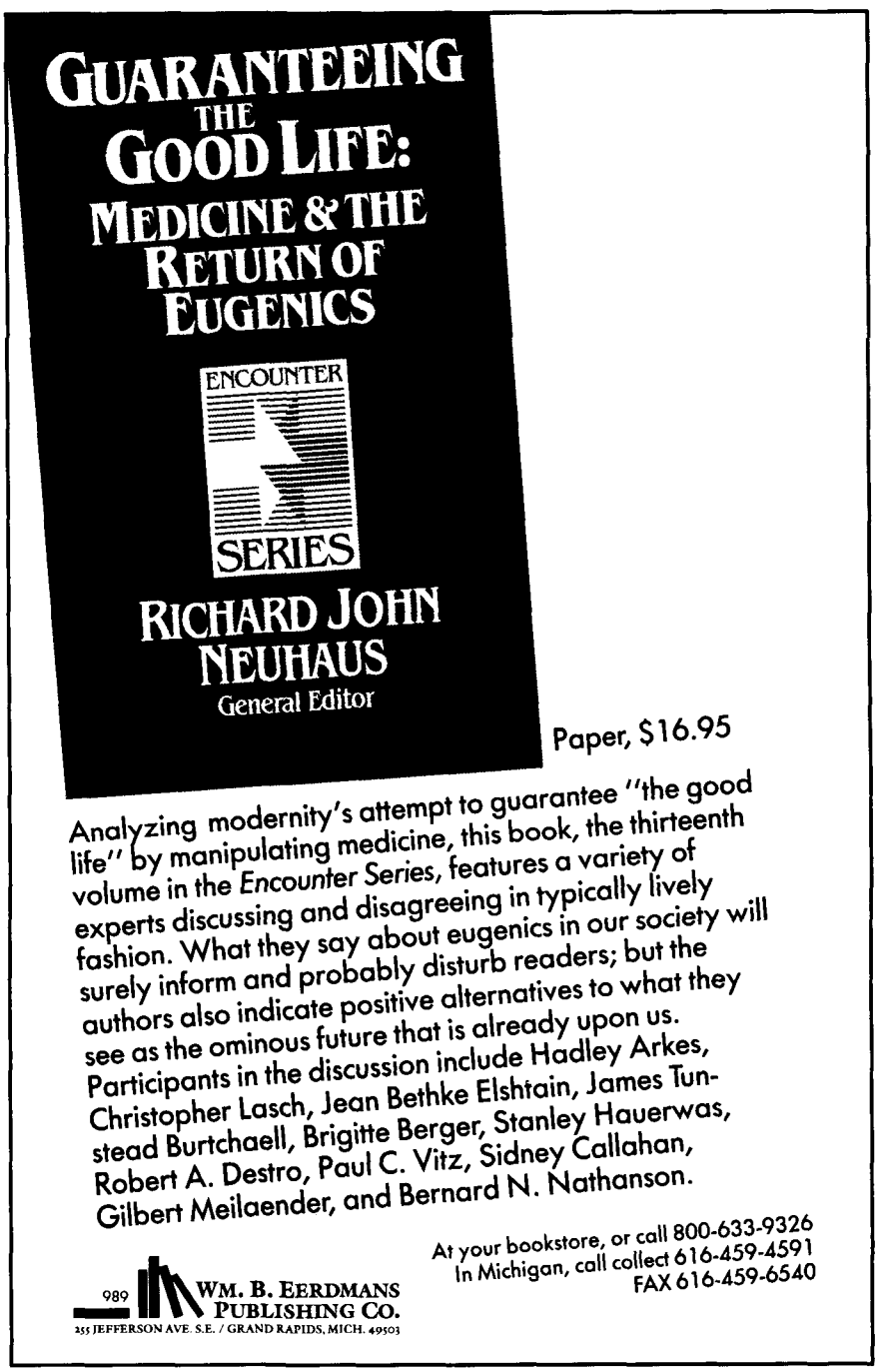
Msgr. José Mariá Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, demonstrates in shocking detail. Excessively prudential concerns about political impact or a potential weakening of accepted "orthodoxy" of practices or beliefs can jeopardize otherwise compelling cases (Archbishop Oscar Romero and Franz Jaegerstaetter providing two contemporary examples). Nor should one overlook obstacles presented by internal ecclesiastical rivalries or controversies that delay or even block progress. The pending causes of Pius IX, Pius XII, and, to some extent, John Henry Newman, testify to this.

One obvious result, of course, is a disparity favoring members of religious communities, especially founders and foundresses, over other individual, especially lay, candidacies. Religious communities can usually meet those costs and more easily provide the continued promotional efforts success may require. Thus, Woodward notes, of the 393 people canonized between the years 1000 and 1987, the laity provided 76 and only 20 of them were women. In addition, the fact that almost all were of the single state leads him to observe that the failure to beatify or canonize anyone for being an exemplary Christian spouse makes it obvious "that a holy marriage alone is not enough to ensure a successful cause."

Obvious and not at all surprising to the sociologist. Here, too, the bureaucratization of sanctity (at least its recognition) virtually assures continuity of established standards. Prospective candidates whose supporters cannot marshal the funds and organization needed for advancement of their cause; whose very claim to recognition may lie in a daring practice of heroic sanctity deemed "controversial" or too likely to "rock the boat" and offend the establishment, whether secular or ecclesiastical; or whose past thoughts and writings might not have been in exact conformity to contemporary definitions of orthodoxy — such candidates are likely to be at an almost insurmountable disadvantage.

To say this, of course, is not to question the validity of the causes that do succeed. *Making Saints* is no exercise in ecclesiastical muckraking. Woodward believes saints "matter" and he is concerned over what seems to be a tragic decline in their relevance and importance to the church and its members. The continuing proliferation of new canonizations presents problems, not least the loss of the universal familiarity and appeal for those who make the grade. A remedy he recommends would put greater emphasis on beatification to favor imitation and veneration of the blessed on a more local or regional scale. He welcomes the congregation's broadened basis for judging sanctity in the historical context, the diminished emphasis upon miracles, and the departure from the older forms of adversarial inquiry.

Saints, a treasure of the church, do indeed matter. In a time of great spiritual need for Christian models to meet the challenges of war, poverty, and all the other social evils with which we must contend, new standards of selection may be in order. "But who, today," Woodward asks, "cares about saints?" This book makes it amply clear he does; and there is reason to hope many others will after reading it. □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THE POWER OF SELF-DESCRIPTION

CARNAL KNOWING
Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West
Margaret R. Miles
Beacon Press, $24.95, 250 pp.

Peggy R. Ellsberg

There is a sixth-century record of a Palestinian monk named Conan, who was in charge of performing baptisms. Adult baptism was the crucial rite of entry into Christian community, and it followed a lengthy period of fasting, exorcism, and instruction. When the adult was finally prepared to enter the baptismal waters, she or he would remove all garments—symbolizing secular values and interests—and come forth stark naked, like a newborn baby entering a new world. The ceremony was extremely powerful, and was often associated with miracles like the one that befell Conan. Conan, it turns out, was uncomfortable about baptizing (and anointing) naked women. One day, when a gorgeous Persian woman presented herself for baptism, he was so disturbed that he fled the monastery. He was halted, however, by an apparition of John the Baptist, who made the sign of the cross over his genitals—thus symbolically castrating him. After this miracle, Conan was able to baptize the Persian and many other women without even noticing which sex they were.

For at least the decade of the 1970s, it seemed that modern feminists were hoping for a miracle like Conan's, one that would eliminate sexual difference and usher in a just and serene social order. But Margaret Miles, who teaches historical theology at Harvard and writes frequently about the visual arts, describes in *Carnal Knowing* a different and more practical agenda—one in which women recognize and assert their own differences and their status as subjects, not objects. In *Carnal Knowing*, Miles investigates the objectification of women's bodies in art and religious texts from earliest Christian times to the seventeenth century. The book also discusses current ideas about representation and women, calling on cutting-edge feminist theory. "'Political power entails the power of self-description,'" she says, quoting Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*. "Perhaps the most accurate test of whether a social group has political power is to ask whether that group enjoys the power of self-representation. People who do not represent themselves live under conditions in which their subjective lives—their feelings, concerns, and struggles—are marginalized from public interest; they also live in constant danger of misrepresentation."

When Perpetua, a third-century Christian arrested and imprisoned with her nursing newborn child, dreamed of her own impending martyrdom, she imagined that her naked body became male, strong, and athletic. When St. Francis in the thirteenth century wanted to make a statement about apostolic poverty, he stripped himself naked. Miles points out that nudity, associated with religious values, had plenty of positive meaning for early Christians. In the baptismal ceremony, nakedness meant innocence and new birth. Throughout the first half of *Carnal Knowing*, Miles focuses on the religious practices of Western Christians—particularly baptism, martyrdom, and asceticism—which require attention to the naked body. She also documents the conflict between the Christian ideal of complete equality between the sexes ("In Christ there is neither male nor female...") and the reality of classical misogyny. The second half of the book considers textual and artistic representation of female nudity.

Some historians (the stick-to-the-text-only sort) might consider it cheating when

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Edited by Justus George Lawler

The non-academic, academic journal that flourished in the sixties and seventies, described as "utterly daring and utterly different,"[1] and as "delving into controversy and presenting strong conviction and thorough research in a handsome format."[2]

continuum is being re-established in the nineties as a journal of history, hermeneutics, and social concern. It will appear three times during the academic year, 200 pp. each issue, centering on the following themes: Autumn--Anti-Semitism, Israel, Feminism; Winter--Reconstructing Poetic, Pictorial, Sacred Texts; Spring--Classic Spiritualities Revived.

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[1]Daniel Berrigan, SJ
[2]Columbia University Journalism Awards

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Miles unearths certain gender assumptions from the sources she examines. After all, Augustine and Paul and Rembrandt and the monk Conan never intended all their hard work to be submitted to twentieth-century feminist analysis. Might not today's gender politics be anachronistic when applied to, say, third-century Carthage? Miles states clearly, however, that her book attempts *not* to alter history, but to urge that the exploration of "female subjectivity is all the more pressing" once one has seen how abundantly historical sources illustrate its absence in the past.

A particularly interesting thesis of *Carnal Knowing* is that until the period of the Reformation, the naked female body was not seen as necessarily sexual. Neither was Original Sin construed as sexual desire. There is a shift, completed by the seventeenth century, toward interpreting nakedness from aesthetic and erotic rather than religious frameworks. And yet, readings of female nudity—whether religious or erotic, whether third- or seventeenth-century—were invariably conducted by men. That is, men did the looking and analyzing. Women's bodies have always been objects of consideration; men have always been the subjects, the active depictors or judges. Men present; women are represented. And representations reinforce and perpetuate certain social norms. Miles points out that medieval (and some modern) women so internalized the image of their bodies as sinful that they engaged in severe and even fatal ascetic practices.

So, as we proceed through the Christian centuries we see human nudity at first as a sign of innocence and fragility. The male can be as naked as the female. Christ himself is naked. But by the period of the Renaissance and Reformation, representations of female nakedness change—women are sensual and sinful, presented for the voyeur's assessment.

REVIEWERS

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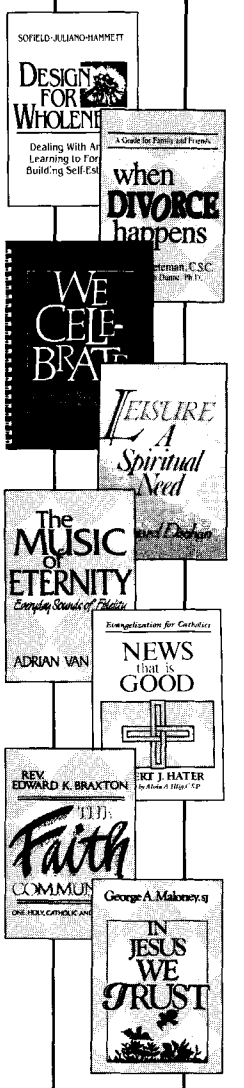
RABBI JACK RIEMER *is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth David in Miami. His new book,* Preludes to Prayers, *will soon be published.*

Fall 1990



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Carnal Knowing is a painstaking scholarly review of a hot subject. It shows how the feminine body is assimilated to the male gaze. And the feminine psyche is subjected to the experience of being an object, of being one who "poses." "The social practice of professional painting," writes Miles, "also insisted on the painter's maleness, as academies in which figure-drawing and painting from nude models were taught did not admit women." Women were allowed into art schools only if they were naked. From Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* to contemporary "men's" magazines, nudity becomes the condition of the female only. She is ever the object—vulnerable, erotic, whatever the eye of the beholder can confer. Fully clothed males enjoy her and fetishize her, disdain and abuse her, whichever they prefer. □

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IN BRIEF

MEMORIES OF MY LIFE IN A POLISH VILLAGE, *by Toby Knobel Fluek, Alfred A. Knopf, $19.95, 110 pp., illustrated.*

I am not a great expert on art but I can tell you that this is a very special book. It is a jewel of a memoir in which words and the art combine to tell a story that has an enormous emotional impact.

The artist, Toby Knobel Fluek, tells the story of her childhood in a small Polish *shtetl*. She describes the life there with its piety and its poverty. Scene by scene, page by page, she lovingly describes her family, her neighbors, and the values by which they lived. And then she describes what it was like when that world came to an end, first, when the Russians invaded, and then, when the Nazis came. And as she does, the art changes in tone. Whereas in the first part of the book, the part that describes the Sabbaths and holy days and the ordinary days, the colors were bright and vivid and cheerful, now as she describes hiding in the cellars and in the woods and what it was like to live behind barbed wire, the paintings become grey and dark and grim.

There is a remarkable quiet dignity to this book. The pictures are almost matter-of-fact and the prose is restrained. She is never maudlin, never sentimental, even when she describes the most gruesome realities. She never manipulates your emotions. She just quietly tells and draws things as they were. And yet I found that on more than one occasion I had to put down this book to dab my eyes and to calm myself.

The sketch of Jews carrying wagons full of dead bodies or the drawing of the burning hospital that was set on fire by the Nazis, with all the people inside, or the painting of the teenager hiding in the woods, are overwhelming in their impact precisely because the artist does not spell out the horror of what she is portraying and recording. There is a pristine power to her words and to her art that is more riveting than there would have been if she had yielded to what must have been an almost irresistible temptation to scream out with anger. There is, for example, a charcoal sketch of two shawled figures crawling

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through barbed wire, and with it a four-sentence commentary that simply says that her mother sent her and her sister away so that they might live, and that she gave them a few pieces of sugar for nourishment because that was all she had. That is all she says—no more, no less. She makes no judgment on a world in which a mother has to do something like that. She leaves that judgment for the reader to make. All she does is paint and write; the paintings and the prose are calm, yet, or perhaps therefore, the total effect is shattering.

I did not think it was possible for another book about the Holocaust to get through to me. I was wrong. This book is special. I recommend it to people of all ages but especially to young people, for it is not a horror story. It is a story about how one human being endured and survived horrors. And this is something the young need to know about and to understand.

There is one page in this book in which the author talks about what it was like to follow the Russian army through the snow, with rags wrapped around their feet, trying to keep ahead of the Nazis. In their group were some German prisoners of war. At one point, one of the Russian soldiers who was guarding these prisoners offered her a gun and asked if she would like to shoot one of these Germans. Quietly she tells of how she said no to the offer, without even being tempted for a moment, because, even though the Nazis had destroyed their lives and their souls, she still could not take another person's life. She says this simply, matter-of-factly, with no boasting, with almost no awareness of how special, how civilized, that made her. She simply records it just the way she records all the other facts of her journey and all the other stops along her way from *shtetl* to hell and from hell to a new world. But I found myself turning back to this page, to the portrait and to the prose, many times after I finished this book.

JACK REIMER

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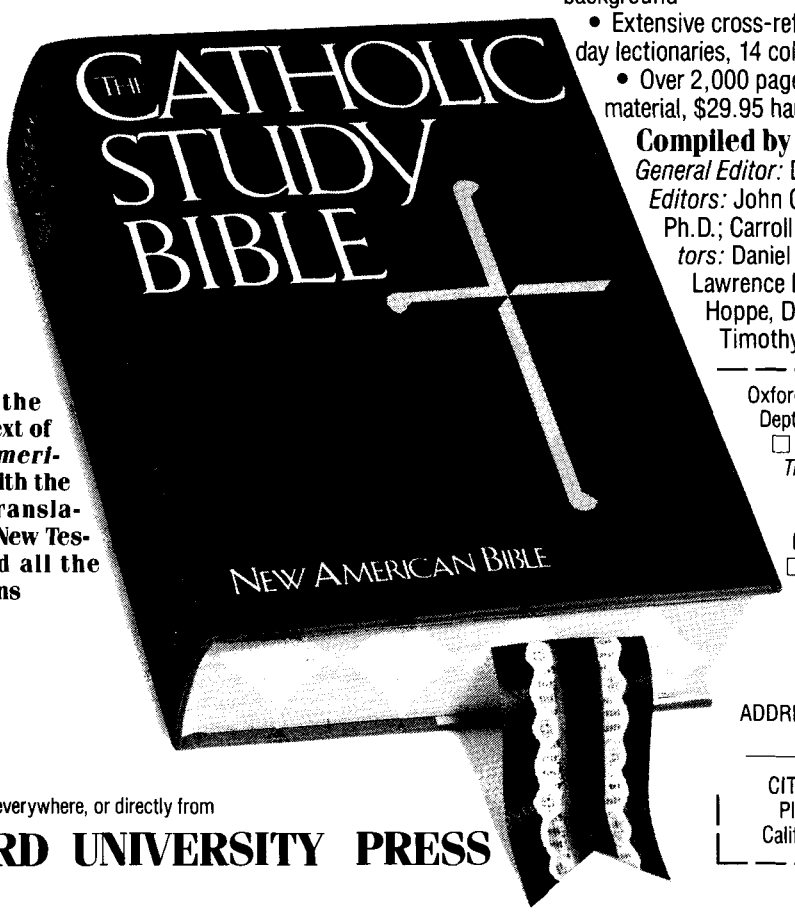

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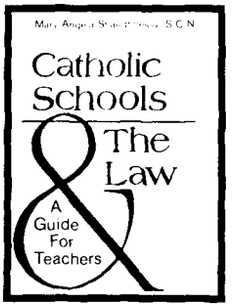

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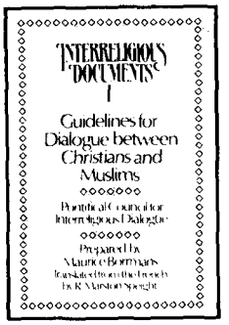

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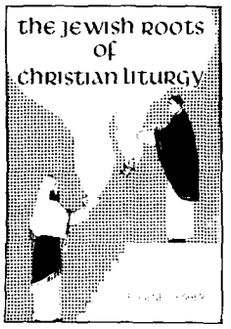

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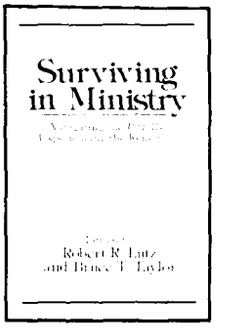

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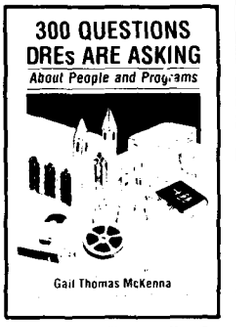

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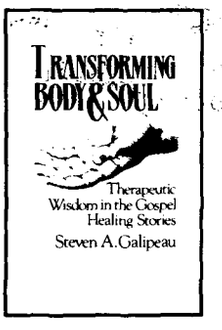

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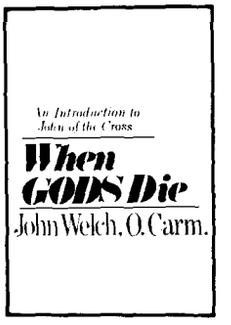

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